

## Communicating Partnership in the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Nigeria's Niger-Delta Region

Solomon Obotetukudo

*You people never will understand the way it works out here. You're all just our guests.  
But you all act like you're at home. Let me tell you something, partner, you ain't home.  
But that's where we're gonna send you if it hell leads to the governor.*  
---*Casino*, The Movie, Universal Pictures/MCA Home Videos, Inc., 1996

The communication acts or activities or policies that evoke partnership necessarily seek to establish bonds and bind peoples and groups together in a common unit, toward a common goal attainment in the overall interest of that unit. To communicate as a partner presupposes the understanding and undertaking that there is a trust and a tacit agreement between and among participants; that the end is mutually negotiated and sought. While the product is very important, the relationship, or the quality of the interactions that produce those products seem to be as equally, if not most important, in many corporate and international as well as interpersonal partnerships.

Almost every word with roots in 'part' has some meanings in, association, collaboration, participation, and connectivity. To be a part is to belong. Several examples come to mind in *partake, participate, partican, partial, partition, partitive, partner, partnership, partook, party.*

Partnership is defined in *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* as: 'the state of being a partner or partners; a joint business; a pair or group of partners. Partner finds synonyms in, sharer, partaker, associate, ally, mate, colleauge, participant, accomplice, accessory, confederate, comrade, cohort, collaborator, companion, fellow, helpmate, alter-ego, friend. Colloquially, we call someone a pal, a sidekick, and a buddy, when she/he is a partner and/or friend.

Efforts to communicate partnership in business relations or transactions are well documented, when structurally,partnerships are commonly referred to as 'joint ventures'. In such arrangements interested and committed members of a profession or interest 'team-up' together to form a profitable enterprise. In the practice of law, medicine, consultancy, engineering, accounting or any of the allied professions, crafts, or masonry, partnerships are formed with aims of maximizing input and output of the well-trained artisans or professionals. All in all, the intent is making profits and advancing careers, prestige and status of the participants. To enter into a partnership therefore assumes a relationship exists or is

potentially existent with interactive exchanges and sharing of expertise, skills, attitudes and behaviors toward a common goal attainment.

Not all partnerships, however, are entered into, based on previous friendships or relationships, even though such a pre-existing association facilitates coming-together, but not necessarily guaranteeing success in partnerships formation. For example, dating a man or woman for umpteenth years before marriage is no guarantee of successful or durable marriage partnerships. The key to successful partnerships of all types and computation or combination is communication.

The communication of partnership has been documented in the studies of teams in business and professional communication (Engleberg & Wynn, 2000), organizational communication (Shockley-Zalabak, 1991), and interpersonal communication (Knapp, 1994). A team is sometimes referred to as, a band, gang, club, squad, body, corps, alliance, crew, cadre, party, or troupe. From team comes the notion of *esprit de corps*, denoting team spirit. This is the ability or intention to work together for the greater good of the team. The team here becomes a single unit for measuring productivity and performance, success or failure of members, and above all, a connection. Team spirit thus evokes collaboration, cooperation, maximization and mobilization of all efforts toward the goal and objectives of the team. In a team it is believed the morale is boosted by the need to succeed together. Hence the paragon of teamwork. Teamwork or partnership encourages peerage, where members are presumed equal in ability and standing or rank or value. Where no such parity exists, partnerships are not initiated. Or, if forced by circumstances to belong, a camaraderie is quickly struck to raise the level of comfortability in task accomplishment (DeWine, 1994). Partnership subsequently, is the belief in shared values of production, effort, training, culture, beliefs, attitudes, skills, performance, age, interest, and sometimes status. Partnership makes the idea of peerage very attractive in building political bases in advanced countries of Great Britain and the United States, and even in less advanced societies. Peerage is thus prevalent and encouraged in professional relationships, through mentoring for promotability, enhanced production and performances, in craftmanships like masonry, journalism, medical practices, and related crafts and professions, where 'peers' show each other the ropes to success.

In peerage and partnering is subsumed, or is a projection and communication of class and status; a form of aristocracy of skilled elites, who band together to enhance their skills, which consequently lead to wealth accumulation and resource apportionment, influence, rank, and status. These attributes of class and privilege do result in deference or respectability, either inherited, earned/achieved, elective/representative, conferred, acquired, appointive, legislative/prescribed, derived, or ascribed (Obotetukudo, 1997; 1996; Moore, 1994). These attributes of class confer privileges that do transfer into tangible benefits.

This exercise examines the hosts-guests transactions between the oil-prospecting-exploring, and oil-producing communities in Nigeria, to determine the nature and scope of their relations as components in the environmental impact assessment. The paper argues that relationships do not exist, but that only business transactions exist between the host and guest communities; and that the environmental degradation or pollution and resource exploitation indicate the predominance of business over relational models of interaction between the host and guests communities. The paper posits that the hosts operate from a relational mode, while the guests operate from a transactional frame of reference. The paper concludes that underlying these varying modes of interacting is the superior-subordinate model which exacerbates relational conflict in the region between stakeholders. A model that relies on partnership as co-equal relationship is proposed, as a precursor to a friendly, preservative, and conservatory environmental policy, enroute intra-communal and national partnerships that would facilitate productive interactions devoid of hostile perennial outbursts of violence and deaths.

### **Partnership Communication In Antiquity**

It is a truism that partnerships and peerage are commonly negotiated, nurtured and prosperous amongst equals, or at least between persons who sublimate their ranks and status for the prospect of a common good and/or benefits that would accrue to self, or to a course of one's choosing. People form groups to accelerate task completion, or to maximize output. Society is formed on the basis of group formation. Marriage is partnership of two or more peoples coming together. From marriage families arise, then communities of villages, towns, cities, come together to form states and nations consequently result.

Politicians for example, enter into partnerships with individuals or groups whom they would not normally or ordinarily associate. So, partnering becomes a matter of attitude and feeling, not rationality. Thus for the practicality of politics and the idea or feeling for the general good, people seeking political offices form partnerships with all kinds of peoples to achieve an end. In sum, all partnerships become necessary for practical human existence.

With society formed, there is social and class stratification, role differentiation and reward systems based on the above categories of deference types, competition and conflicts manifest. The need to negotiate or sometimes contain conflict obligates the ranks and status maintainers and distributors to reconsider their roles and responsibilities in society. In Great Britain for example, the ideas surrounding peerage, and nobility have encouraged the proliferation of titles and honorifics such as: lordship, lady, duke, duchess, marquess, marquis, earls, viscounts, barons, baroness, counts, among many others (Moore, 1994). This allows for the widening of the circles of honorifics, intent to silence, co-opt, and reward more people in the British hierarchical system.

Nigerian societies have had, and continually re-invent social and cultural stratification, in consonance with those traditional Nigerian societies where deference to the traditions of rulers had always been paramount in patronage distribution, system maintenance, and by implication, partnership formation. Typical examples are: Yoruba and Benin Kingdoms, (Crowder and Ikime, 1971); the Hausa Kingdoms, Kanuri, Nupe and Emirates, (Whitaker, Jr., 1976), and the British created Warrant Chieftainships in the Southeastern Nigeria, where models persist in the Obong of Calabar and the Amanyanabo of Opobo, (Dike, 1956; Afigbo, 1973; Jones, 1963). Partnerships in stratified societies consequently, depend on birth, status and rank, wealth and lineage (Wallech, 1986, pp. 409-431). Even the United States, the most self-acclaimed egalitarian society, still relishes in class, rank, status, and skill, and all the perks and patronages derived and attendant therefrom (McDonald, 1985, esp., pp. 96-142).

### **Partnership And Oil Industry In Nigerian State Formation**

The rise of oil exploration in Southeastern Nigeria in the second half of the twentieth century definitely brought another group of Europeans into contacts with the traditional communities who were not at that time Nigerians. It must be noted that Nigeria was a British creation in 1914. Before then were the Southern and Northern Protectorates. It was not until 1960's independence that these diverse peoples became a single political unit called Nigeria. Prior to this arbitrary date, the different peoples in these communities traded and intermingled as best they could (Ade-Ajayi & Crowder, 1976; Coleman, 1958). Partnership of the structural type, as in business and political associations were rare. Where they occurred, those interactions were on good faith and by words-of-mouth. A man's word was his bind. Partnerships were entered into based on deference characteristics of culture, lineage, marriage, social groups, artisanship, apprenticeships, cultural similarity and proximity, socio-political-communal presence, socio-cultural class, wealth, and family honor. (Dike, 1956; Crowder, 1962).

Infusing foreign modalities (military rulership of the Nigerian Federal Government, the increasingly complex and powerful multinational oil exploration and drilling companies, and the accompanying foreign capital and their international agents and agencies) of partnership into the oil producing areas with the advent of expansive oil exploration corporations and their nationalities into the region, different modalities of cultural and social negotiations entered the equation (Biersteker, 1987). The new partnerships that emerged were based on inter-and intra-ethnic exploitation, acquisitive fantasies, militarism of Nigeria's Federal Government dominated by military rulership of the Hausa-Fulani-Yoruba ethnic groupings'controlled national politics in the post-1966 military coups. By the time of Babangida-Abacha military dictatorships, partnerships in Nigeria's oil producing relationships were at the mercy of gun runners and paid assassins (Greenpeace International, 1994; Osaghae, 1995).

Partnership and participation subsequently become interlocking concepts in the communication of relationship or interaction. One cannot relate with, or to those with whom

one does not participate. Conversely, one can participate without partnering. This is ironic. For, how can one communicate participatively without forming partnership with those other *non-participants*? The age of telecommunication and information technologies make these kinds of *interactions from a distance* very vicariously feasible and prevalent. Thus, it is not uncommon for foreign, and in fact, local oil companies' executives and managers in Nigeria's oil producing and oil exploring communities, to not *interact* and not *relate* with their host communities, and yet, still conduct the 'normal business transactions' on a daily basis. The quality of these various types and shades of interactions informs this study.

### **Partnership Imperatives And Oil Industry Stakeholders**

The inequities suffered by the Niger Delta peoples, can be attributed to their station on the hierarchically stratified Nigerian society, where they are conceived, perceived, ranked, located, and treated as underlings; as minorities not deserving to be associated with 'aristocrats' and 'majority peoples', who are also part constituents of Nigeria (Osaghae, 1995). This mind-set transfers into the allocation and distribution of concrete and intangible resources in proportion to the number of peoples in a geographical area, thereby discounting the source of the resources, even though the bulk of these resources are derived from the so-called minority enclaves (Obotetukudo, *Nimbyism*, 2002, under preparation).

Relationship building becomes relevant in the appropriation, preservation, and conservation of resources. Because the relationship between Nigeria's ruling elites, who predominantly come from the so-called majority ethnic groups, the multinational oil exploration, drilling, and marketing companies intertwine, to undermine the integrity and personhoods of the so-called minority peoples of the oil-producing territories, it is common to dismiss the latter's position on the hierarchy as insignificant in the larger scheme of political exploitation and class domination in Nigeria. This writer in no way disparages the Nigerian nation-state, as much as he throws aspersions at those complicitous elite Nigerians in their relationships with the multinational corporations, to denigrate and marginalize their fellow Nigerian citizens.

In a relationship of equals and colleagues, there is mutual respect, even if there are categories of partnership, as in a business joint venture, where there is a senior and junior partner. Being labelled a junior partner serves a structural convenience and fiduciary functions, in that it motivates the junior to dedicate and commit him/herself; be competitive, and productive, thereby increasing performance and oftentimes the profitability of the enterprise. All these efforts are expended with sights set on climbing the ladder of the corporate entity over time. But in the case of Nigeria, where each and every people agreed to become partners on the same date and time, there is no dichotomization into senior or junior partners. Every people started on the same level. But to the extent that those who brought in the most national fiscal capital and profit to the sustenance of the corporate estate are perpetually inferiorized and marginalized, it calls for a reconsideration of the relationship in

both concrete, and tangible, as well as intangible proportions. Persons who have relationships transact interactions and “still stay-in-touch;” those who do not, only transact business and do not maintain an on-going rewarding and self-actualizing relationships.

### **Class And Productivity On Partnership Communication**

It is the middle and upper classes that create wealth, produce, and maintain civilizations. Wealth and the attendant languages and cultures they create definitely perpetuate and, in fact dominate world cultures (Williams, 1983). Thus, it is members of that class or members of the educated and propertied class, who inadvertently teach same values to their children and the children of others who come in contact with them. It is not harder to understand or accept that members of these classes as cultural managers, constitute cultural elites and hence cultural markers for their respective communities. These classes set the ruling classes from those who lack the cultural and linguistic refinements necessary for admission and sustenance in the class structure. Standard cultural dialects, while not inherently superior to any other dialect spoken by other classes or cultural strata, does however, confer social, political, and economic power on the users.

The Nigerian elites who approximate, and appropriate the wealth created by oil exploration and marketing are therefore creating a class that ought to influence and determine the future values of Nigeria. These Nigerian elites do not understand their responsibilities and roles as cultural icons, cultural preservers, conservers, and hence proselytizers of the authentic Nigerian, nay African, civilizations.

Wealth dictates responsibility. Being a member of a class requires rules of behaviors appropriate to type, station, and status in society. Hence participation rituals in group formation and maintenance. Social status is, in effect, or, ought to be determined by one's productive capacity and re-inventing proclivities while stationed in the hierarchy. Productivity is concomittantly rewarded by rank and status. If production and performance determine profitability, they should be rewarded accordingly, for example by inclusion and associational partnerships in classes or ranks correspondent to their productivity. In Nigeria, this logic does not hold sway (Soyinka, 1996).

The intial link between class and production was first made by a French theoretician-banker, Richard Cantillon in his essay, *Essai sur la nature du commerce en general*, sometime between 1730 and 1734, but published in 1755. His theory focused attention on new wealth created by production. This view shifted emphasis away from trade, treasure, or landed estates as the main sources of wealth. In essence, this perception posits that roles in the production of any activity might be more important than social positions due property ownership. Thus, production of goods and services became the new outlet for wealth creation. Also, this demonstrated the link between the roles production plays and the status that followed.

Premised on ownership of productive capacities, it became more evident that land and labor were of intrinsic value in wealth accumulation. But more than that, the third element, skill in the production and cultivation of the land added a new twist to sources of wealth. This conceptualization is appropriate to understanding wealth creators and distributors in the Nigerian oil economy, and how such management and transfer across generations facilitate or inhibit partnership, relationships and interactions, across Nigerian peoples.

Oil and its derivative products constitute the land using Cantollin's typology. But the labor and skills employed in harnessing and marketing them become even more crucial in wealth creation in Nigeria. That is where partnership comes to play. And the next question becomes, who controls these means of production, harnessing, packaging and marketing these by-products? The Delta regions occupy the lands and the adjoining waters where oil is found, drilled, and marketed, but they do not constitute partners in all these productive processes, and thus, remain poor, marginalized, and subordinated.

The kinds of partnerships that are formed in these processes become critical in relationship creation and maintenance between the Nigerian Federal Government, the oil exploring-drilling-marketing, and oil-producing communities. As it is today, the indigenes of the oil-producing communities are rarely partners, and therefore excluded from wealth acquisition and accumulation. Lacking in such privileges, these communities are poised for eternal dependency, and subordination. It is no wonder that Saro-Wiwa titled one of his books, *Genocide in Nigeria* (1992).

The natives in Nigeria's oil producing communities remain at the bottom of the wage-earning strata. This is a wage structure Adam Smith called the "natural price" of labor, which is the wage paid in support services to keep the main industry running. These wages basically keep the laborers coming back to work, just to keep their bodies and soul going for the owners and controllers of production. These wages never make them wealthy.

Wealth is not a product, but a process of acquisition and accumulation and transference, either by association or inheritance. Wealth accumulates with time, and luck or hardwork. But riches could be acquired overnight, hence the deriding phrase, *nouveau riche*. New strategies for communicating partnership in the oil industry is thus needed to forestall the cycles of violence, and, through wealth accumulation and transfer, foreshadow sustainable development in the Niger Delta region, and all over Nigeria.

Insofar as the members of the majority groups in Nigeria and the operators of these oil-exploring and oil-drilling multinational oil corporations deny the other peoples constituting the Nigerian corporate state, the access and productive capacities to create and maintain wealth from their own resources drilled from their own backyards, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a conscious and deliberate effort to perpetually marginalize these other Nigerians and deny them wealth generating capacities. So long as the monies and remunerations given to

these indigenous owners of lands and labor, are just sufficient for mere subsistence existence in ordinary food, clothing, and housing, but not to enable them procreate, and train successive generations of Nigerians, and without any extra to participate actively in the national economy and politics, these communities and individual persons would for ever remain at minimum wage levels fit for slaves and bonded and bounded citizens of Nigeria.

The communication of participation in the oil industry, as in other sectors of Nigeria's corporate state, is more a political choice and decision than it is a matter of derivation. The recent Supreme Court of Nigeria's decision to distinguish between off-shore and on-shore oil finds is instructive. The decision seems as act of economic castration of the oil-producing areas by the Federal Government, in cohort with the multinational executives in the oil business. Here was the classic case of communicating partnership based on the power structures and positions on the hierarchy. The Federal Government in partnership with oil companies put its weight on the highest court in the land, to apportion the nation's wealth the way it sees fit, but to the chagrin of the local communities.

### **Partnership Maintenance In Environmental Impact Assessment**

The epigraph at the start of this paper alludes to different conceptions and interpretations of home. When applied to the issue of partnership in Nigeria it raises several questions such as: "Where is home?"; "Whose home?"; "Which home?"; "Is there a home?"; "Is the environment constitutive of that home, their home, or our home?" The home sought after, and to go to, may not necessarily be the physically and spatially situated home intended by the enterprising, exploitative, manipulative, the ecstatic. or nostalgic Nigerian.

Any assessment of rules of partnership in the communication of the climate, the context, the environment and situations at points of interactions and connectivity demand a new conceptualization of the Nigerian environment. That re-conceptualization need not be limited to oil pollution, but also to the psychological and mental home, polluted in the oil exploration, drilling, gas flaring, and oil-spill spreading. In that regard, a partnership that goes beyond the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria is needed to begin this environmental impact assessment. To the extent that all Nigerians can lay claim to a geographical space they call "home," the communication of a struggle to preserve and conserve that "home" should be the spiritual as well as emotional call of action to every Nigerian. Environmental impact assessment heretofore, needs to consider a re-definition of home and environment, as conceptualized, and used by the different ethnic and professional cadres both in Nigeria's oil and non-oil sectors of the economy.

Partnership maintenance, and hence relationship, requires specific actions and activities across time and space. Relationship maintenance experts have noted several taxonomies that make such possible (Canary, Stanford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993; Canary and Stafford, 1994). Five of such factors are: positivity, networking, assurance, openness, and supportive



strategies. I will discuss each later. But the relevance of these dimensions of relationship maintenance to the project at hand, is based on the need for a re-conceptualization of the environmental, geographical, spatial assessment, and by implication, the emotional and cultural ramifications of those evaluations on the “home” environment.

Impact assessment hinges on risks/benefits trades-off. As an illustration, the oil-producing communities may interact and negotiate to reduce or eliminate the risks, increase benefits to all stakeholders, including the Federal Government. Or, they may vacate the region, as did Ogoni refugees to neighboring Cameroon Republic (Saro-Wiwa, *They're Killing My People*, 1993); and the oil-exploring and drilling communities may look elsewhere for oil exploration sites. But so long as every “partner” and participant in Nigeria’s oil industry remains and call this place “home”, and continue in oil exploration and marketing, because the industry serves vital financial needs to the Nigerian Federal Government, the local communities, as well as the oil companies, it makes sense that the local communities be appropriately compensated. Their “homelands” serve Nigeria’s and oil companies needs.

Local communities, it must be remembered, accept and bear greater risks of losing their homes by sheer fact of exploration and drilling in their backyards. While the oil companies may relocate to other oil finds, these communities can hardly do the same. Others sources have documented negative environmental impacts to include oil spills, gas burnoffs and blowouts that destroy the creeks and make them unfishable and unpenetrable by local fishermen; the destruction of farmlands, and pollution of drinking spring waters (Greenpeace International, 1994). In *Genocide in Nigeria*, Kenule Saro-Wiwa, the foremost Nigerian environmental activist, of Ogoni heritage captured the enormity of devastation thus:

To the Ogoni people, the land on which they lived and the rivers

which surrounded them were very important. They not only provided sustenance in abundance, they were also a spiritual inheritance. The land is a god and is worshipped as such. The fruit of the land, particularly yams, are honoured in festivals and, indeed, the Annual Festival of the Ogoni is held at the yam harvest. The planting season is not a mere period of agricultural activity; it is a spiritual, religious and social occasion. ‘Tradition’ in Ogoni means in the local tongue (*doonu kuneke*) the honoring of the land (earth, soil, water)...To the Ogoni, rivers and streams do not only provide water for life—for bathing drinking, etc.; they do not only provide fish for food, they are also sacred and are bound up intricately with the life of the community, of the entire Ogoni nation. (Saro-Wiwa, 1992, pp. 12-13).

These claims about pristine pre-colonial, and pre-oil exploration Ogoni lands are testimonial to the degradations brought on the same lands by oil exploration. Furthermore, Saro-Wiwa’s assertions point to Ogoni peoples connection to their lands, as sources of food, procreation, recreation, spirituality, and economic development. Ogonis, in short owned their lands and all

that came from them—a cultural as well as a spiritual inheritance and heritage to be passed on to succeeding generations.

Because the oil companies may not share in the same vision of the land, the consequent deforestation, defoliation, and pollution by oil exploration, drilling and gas burnouts devastate the lands and water, thereby destroying the peoples traditions, culture, that had sustained both the community, the economy, the natural ecology and their civilization, before the advent of oil industry in the region.

While some pundits might want to dismiss these assertions as sentimental and propagandistic (Orage, 1998, pp. 41-48), the lack of understanding between the oil companies and other non-native Nigerians to the region, made the framing of assessment as criminal acts against a people's culture and their humanity, coherent and highly fidel to the global perceptions of human rights organizations. Walter Fisher in narrative paradigm sees communication coherence as occurring when a story corresponds with human experiences; and that fidelity is determined by "whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true to their lives" (1987, p.5). Ogoni's stories of deprivation found fidelity in the ears of the world outside Nigeria. The Ogonis, through MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People) courted and nurtured partners who were favorably predisposed to Ogoni predicament in Nigeria.

Most other Nigerians were distant from Ogoni's outcries because they felt, the devastation was not in their homes, and that it did not affect them directly. It supports the assertion that most Nigerians do not see the spatial and geographical Nigeria as their home. Therefore, no other Nigerian group thought it worth the while to participate as partners in the struggles by Ogoni peoples for the preservation and conservation of the commodity that every Nigerian depends on for their survival. It was again that mentality symptomatic of "not-in-my-backyard" and "sitting-on-the fence till it all blows over" syndromes. (Obotetukudo, 2002 under preparation).

Andrew Apter (1998, p. 121-160) re-echoes Saro-Wiwa's charges of genocide, noting that Nigerian ethnic politicizing had traditionally despised and marginalized the Ogoni peoples in Nigeria's Federal structure. Other Nigerians saw Ogoni agitations as unpatriotic; while a great many others believed the Ogoni's were less than one million in a country of 150 million, and thus negligible in the larger scheme of political manouverings (Na'Allah, 1998). By refusing to form coalitions with Ogoni peoples, other Nigerian peoples played dead, dumb, or ignorant to the issues that were closest to the hearts of every Nigerian's survivability ( Na'Allah, *Ogoni's Agonies*, 1998).

Alliances with others communicate power. It has the additional benefits of increasing visibility, negotiation leverage, self-confidence and minimized stress. Because alliances or coalitions are based on common interests, the lack of such coalitions among and between Nigerians in

the fight to preserve the nation's 'life-blood', the crude oil from the Niger Delta States, tantamount to ignorance of what is common interest among Nigerians. Besides, the demonstrable lack of alliance in the struggle to preserve and conserve Nigeria's natural resources by Nigerians of all ethnic groups and religious affiliations, communicated a lack of partnership and ignorance in the management of the nation's natural resource.

Five factors according to Canary and Stafford ( 1994) constitute key characteristics in relationship maintenance: positivity, network, openness, assurances, and supportive communication strategies. *Positivity* is communicating in enjoyable, cooperative, cheerful manner and with optimism with one's partner. *Openness* involves self-disclosing feelings about the nature of the relationship. *Assurances* center around the ability and desire to remain involved in and be committed to the relationship. *Networks* refer to common memberships or affiliations the partners belong. *Supportive strategies* involve encouraging, participating, and sharing in tasks toward relationship maintenance. To the extent that these communicative-behavioral acts were missing from other non-Ogoni peoples, in the engagement of Ogoni people and the Federal Government and Shell Petroleum Development Company, it points to a lack of cross-national and inter-ethnic associations and partnerships in negotiating wealth creation, wealth distribution, and hence self-identification and self-actualization within the Nigerian nation state.

A lack of intra-ethnic coalition in the conservation and distribution of the nation's wealth also points to a lack of a feeling of nationhood, belonging, association, and identification between and among the diverse peoples in Nigeria. The Nigerian state has never been truly *nationalized* since its independence in 1960. But there have been three noticeable stages in the not-so-evolutionary process of the Nigerian nation-statism. First, Nigeria was *internationalized* with the 1973 oil crises that catapulted Nigeria onto the international scene, as a key crude supplier and player to Africans and the West. Second, the oil boom precipitated a *centralized* Nigerian state, wherein all monies from the oil were distributed by the increasingly unitary military government. Because the oil wells and money were thought undepletable, no Nigerian really cared or even asked questions about their intrinsic self-worths as Nigerians. Nigerians were all one so long as the money kept flowing from the oil wells of the Oil Rivers and their adjacent Shell terminals in Ikot Abasi, in today's Akwaibom State. The third phase was the *privatization* of the Nigerian state, complicated by the logic of what Joseph (1987) calls prebendalism. The privatization of the Nigerian state followed on the heels of global currency re-structuring and economy down-sizing of the 1980's. Though formed in 1960, twenty years was not long enough for any country as diverse and large as Nigeria to have discovered itself. Thus, Nigeria skipped a very critical stage, *nationalization*, in its gestation period toward nationalism and identification.

Nigeria's problems and its search for itself is symptomatic of a nation in crisis of identity. This crisis manifests in self-doubts and the corresponding demise of its citizenry, the collapse of the nation-state, and the evisceration of values that had hardly found roots in nation-statism, and hence absent cross-ethnic and inter-state partnerships at a deeper level than political parties.

Relationship is maintained when there is shared commonness in beliefs and expectations. Lacking in this, the disparate and variegated Nigerian 150 peoples opted for 'everyone for itself and none for anyone else'. In a published interview in *The News*, (May 17, 1993) Ken Saro-Wiwa expressed his anger at non-support and distancing behaviors he experienced from other Nigerians whenever he broached the concerns of Ogoni people living in the polluted oil-producing environment:

The environment was being degraded and people were being driven from their land. Today there is a colony of 18,000 Ogoni people in Cameroon who have been driven off their land, and off the fishing ports, because the oil companies have taken the farming land and have messed up places we used to fish. Well, to make this argument for a small group of people requires a lot. It was clear to me because each time I raised the matter, my audience was hostile. That is, other Nigerians. It did not matter whether they were top military brass or people in academia whom I knew very well. Or even politicians whom I also knew well. All of them were hostile. (*They Are Killing My People*, 1993).

The Ogoni's struggle was for survival in a bankrupt nation-state that could not defend itself, its citizens, distribute its resources equitably enough to warrant reliance from its outlying states, especially, those not privileged to the connections at the center. A passive revolution was born in the hearts of many Nigerians who lacked access to the ruling cliques. But only the Ogoni people were able to articulate the frustration because the oil was carted away daily from their doorsteps, yet they had no foods on their tables, could not afford to go to school, had no minimum wages, and nothing to show for their god-endowed natural resource, the so-called black gold. The oil producers themselves were not 'party' to the accumulation and redistribution of the oil wealth. Lacking in partnership or associational rituals expected of co-equals in partnerships, the Ogoni people revolted, to the dismay of the central rulers, who had never cared to understand what the ordinary Nigerians wanted, thought, or felt. This thinking corresponds with the rational model of management, where there is a strict, formal, and purely transactional relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the master and the servant, similar to what obtained in colonial and/or imperial, and slavery periods in human development.

### **Rational Model Of Partnership Communication**

The rational model of communicating partnership uses standard criteria for evaluating and assessing participants on the bases of obedience to authority of those with power, however such power was obtained and maintained; productivity and performance from the

subordinates or employees; and profitability to the enterprise. It is very hierarchical, along superior-subordinate axis of interaction. This is what obtained in the corporate structure in the oil-producing and oil-exploring communities in Nigeria. This management philosophy was in consonance with the *modus operandi* of the larger Nigerian political state, where the military had ruled for twenty-nine of the forty-two years of independence. This management style and philosophy measures outcomes in a deductive, mechanistic, and, means- ends- goals matrix. The interactants here follow a script, and adhere strictly to the script written for, and interpreted by bottom-line managers.

This model excludes and precludes input from subordinates, while relying on the classical management models of top-down efficiency production characterized in authoritarian leadership and communication styles (Conrad, 1990). Obviously, this model has its place in production lines where diligence, time, and volume production is critical to profitability. But, it falls short of the human element in a volatile and a scarce natural resource management and allocation processes, though not necessarily procedures, in a plural community of diverse peoples like Nigeria.

Participatory communication, as opposed to the rational model, invokes images of representation and inclusion. But when a national tragedy of the magnitude of environmental degradation and deprivation of a people's source of livelihood is ignored by both the general and specific Nigerian audiences, who rely on the top-down approach to problem-solving, it refocuses attention on the ethos of participatory democracy, citizenship roles, rights, and responsibilities. Nigerians of all regions and religious persuasions, ethnicities, classes and status need to realize as Nigerians, there are specific and particular relationships they all must create, nurture and communicate, for there to be a general feeling of being home as a Nigerian. This is the basis for communicating partnership proposed in this paper.

### **Phenomenological Rationality Model Of Communicating Partnership**

Because humans cannot be truly rational due limitations of intellection and uninformed and informed self-interests skewed by such variables as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, among others, a more eclectic model for communicating partnership is proposed here. I have labelled it *phenomenological rationality of partnership communication*. This is where the interactivity of all participants determine the usefulness of the information or data sought and collected, the decisions, and, outcomes for all participants. The model is people-centered. Its tenets are: (i) recency of experience; (ii) relevancy to context and persons; (iii) sustainability of outcomes measured in tangible and non-tangible results; and (iv) continuous reviewing processes with detailed parameters and expectations from all partners. Phenomenological rationality places responsibilities, and mandates accountability from the Federal Government of Nigeria, the multinational oil exploring and drilling companies, as well as the oil producing communities.

A phenomenological rationality of partnership communication is holistic and relativistic. It avoids a received-view rationality of “one-size-fits-all” approach to human problem-solving. It exemplifies immediate or rapid responses to specific and particular concerns and problem areas, such as oil spills, oil spreading, wealth distributi~~on~~, environmental pollution, natives’ and the general localities’ concerns of drinking water, fishing, outdoors recreational activities, health problems, quality of life issues, employment, and the legal and socio-economic- cum-political-cum cultural implications of oil explorations and drilling on the environment. It is home-grown and home-made environmental impact management, not just assessment.

This model places the citizenry at the center of revenue distribution, through the representatives of the Federal, the States and Local Governments’ elected officials. In essence, the Senate, representing the largest constituencies from each state, would have the direct policy-making apparatus from the oil producing communities. The Senate therefore, becomes the intermediary between the Federal Government and the oil companies. Rather than take directives for revenue allocation from the Federal Government, the oil companies would do so from the Senate, the highest law-making body in the nation. In this model, the Federal Government only executes Senate decisions. And, the oil companies are essentially not seen as meddlers in the policy-making of an independent nation.

Because the Senate and the respective State Houses constitute the legislative arms of the government, the model assumes there would be representation from the oil-producing communities, and that these communities’ interests would be protected. Moreover, occasional open forums and town-hall meetings with the local communities by the legislators would accomodate citizen concerns.

But the problem is re-negotiating an arcane relationship established in the colonial era, where the so-called Crown owned all the resources of their colonial possessions. In that relationship, the peoples and their resources, lives, and properties were owned by the Crown. That was how and why every deprived peoples in the world fought for their independence to own their personal and collective rights to determine their fates. I am compelled to draw parallel to the most recent experience in human depravity, when the white-minority in South Africa controlled all the diamond and mineral resources in South Africa, with the majority black African serving only as on-lookers. It is on record that Nigeria spearheaded, hosted, financed, and chaired several sessions to see the end of apartheid. Ironically, Nigeria is practising policies similar to apartheid, by separating and marginalizing resource owners in the Delta Regions of Nigeria.

Nigeria is no longer a Crown Colony. There are no senior or junior partners in Nigeria. Every region, and ethnicity agreed to the formation of the Nigerian state on the same day and time. Each came with its own resources, both human and non-human. Each is thus entitled to equal treatment and representation. The tendency for persons or regions or clusters of elites, who have acquired wealth by default, association, or inheritance, to use these as conceptual and

perceptual filters through which the lower and middle class Nigerians must be contained and restrained from accessing their naturally-endowed wealth is a violation of the principles of partnership.

National and political relationship should follow from 'natural' relationships of equals, based on the processes of mutual respect. Since Nigerians agreed to come together as a single political unit in 1960, there need not be any one superior party in this union. Each person and peoples or enclaves need be accorded equal regard and representation, distribution of wealth based on natural endowments, skill, performance, productivity, effort, and appointments and opportunities to self-actualize; that is, to be all that one can and wants to become within the territorial boundaries of the Nigerian nation-state.

The concept of natural endowment is intriguing because it addresses the much-touted issue of derivation. If nature placed gold and diamond or any sought-after mineral for that matter, under the soil upon which any Nigerian lives and cultivates, it is imperative and commonsensical that that Nigerian own such resources. The said Nigerian by association and partnership is entitled to protection by Nigeria to the extent he/she is granted the freedom to explore, exploit, and market or process these resources for his/her benefit.

The Nigerian state in the above hypothetical scenario has the right to extract revenue or levy tax on the productivity and profits accruing from such mineral exploration and marketing, to offset its expense in protecting the citizen mineral owner. It is that simple. This is the case in the United States, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, Netherlands, United Kingdom (Feldman, 1998; Barrett, et. al., 1998) and every other advanced nation in the world. This philosophy of land ownership explains humans motivation for war, to acquire territories that would enhance their productive capacities and hence their profitability, wealth, influence and power. Any denial of such natural rights to resource ownership and control is a denial of what it is to be an individual, or a Nigerian citizen, irrespective of place of birth, religion, region, state, height, gender, and language spoken (*The Nigerian Constitution*, 1959, 1963, 1979, 1999).

Communicating partnership therefore assumes equal treatment of participants. Since partnership is an association willingly or freely entered into, one who feels not rewarded in such association should have the discretionary right to terminate such partnership. I am not agitating for the balkanization of Nigeria. Instead, the thrust of the arguments presented here is that partners need be accorded equal treatments and respect, for the association to be worth the effort and deserving of continuity.

## **Conclusions**

I have given the concept of partnership communication in Nigeria, both a historical and theoretical consideration in this exercise. In fact, I have applied it in the specific case of the oil industry in the Niger Delta Regions of Nigeria. I discussed the roles and status differentiations, and the meaning of "home", and how such determine the ways Nigerians perceive and relate

to one another as peers, colleagues, teammates, and partners in working and non-working relationships. I also noted that the Nigerian nation is in its infancy and therefore going through a difficult stage of nationalization in its gestatory period; but that it got distracted in those not-so-practical stages of internationalization, centralization and privatization, to her own detriment. Finally, I concluded that the partnership of equals based on trust, respect, and equal treatment is what Nigeria needs for its survival, that would enable anyone who so chooses to call it a home. Equal partners would have to be supportive, assuring, positivizing, networking and open with one another. Communicating partnership model offered here to be effective, has to imbibe the four tenets identified as: recency of experiences and events, relevancy of contexts, sustainability of outcomes, and continuing reviewing process.

Communicating partnership between the multinational oil corporations has to be re-negotiated based on mutual regard, respect, and profit sharing. Such a working relationship has the potential for friendliness when all parties are included, and consulted as to the limitations of expectations, given the heavy financial investments from the exploring and drilling communities.

Unless the Nigerian Federal Government, the multinational oil and related companies, as well as the host communities realize this and adopt realistic, yet aggressive partnership model within a stipulated time frame for assessing and calculating cost-benefit ratios, there will continue to be instability, conflict, disaffection and consequently, unsatisfying working and personal relationships, and unrewarding association between the so-called 'superior and subordinate' Nigerians and the expatriates.

Because of the complex and diverse environment where oil companies operate in Nigeria, there cannot be a universally applied blue-print solution to each community's concerns, needs and expectations. The goal of the model as proposed here is to make a home out of the environment where human intervention is moderated, in order to sustain human life. A home is consequently made in partnership with many others, if not all facets in the polity, intent on preserving its culture, and hence its civilisation. It is instinctual for all animals to protect their homes. Nigerians are not different. A national partnership of all stakeholders is needed to preserve and conserve and protect Nigeria's home.

The phenomenological rationality model of communicating partnership places the citizens at the center of the grid. In the particular case of oil exploration, drilling and marketing, the peoples of Nigeria become the most paramount stakeholders. The Federal Government of Nigeria becomes a care-taker of, and for the people; the preserver, and, conservator of the territorial integrity of the geo-political Nigeria. When outside stakeholders, like the multinational oil corporations, or any other similar, inside and/or outside agencies, are brought into the equation, such agents and agencies remain as appendages, nonetheless, catalysts, to the



core political imperatives of Nigerian's survivability and sustainability. Thus, a true partnership is communicated and nurtured in a continuous interaction and relationship among co-equals.

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