

Issues In Access And Management Of Natural Resources: The Case of Akassa Community Forests Management And Development Plan.

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1) Introduction

Policies regarding land tenure and resource access are of great significance for assuring the sustainable management and use of natural resources in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where majority of the people still rely heavily on their natural resources to provide income, employment and livelihoods. The oil and gas industry is the most important sector in the Niger Delta economy, crude oil and gas reserves in the region are estimated at 25 billion barrels and 130 trillion cubic feet respectively (Omene, 2004). The history of the Niger Delta is dotted with an array of systems by which people gain access to and manage their natural resources. Customary tenure systems remain the predominant means through which people manage and gain access to land and other natural resources. These systems are based on the values of the local people to the extent that these values confer legitimacy on the decision making process. The general characteristics of customary tenure systems include the inalienability of land so that families have secure and inheritable land holdings that cannot be traded freely on the market. Customary tenure system was disrupted by colonial incursions as the colonial State forcefully appropriated hinterland trading routes that served as routes of palm oil trade. During this period, the Niger Delta especially the coastal areas lost control over land as such land became property of the colonial State. Expectations that the end of colonialism in 1960 would lead to land restitution did not materialize. Rather independence resulted in emergence of an overbearing State that enacted laws that contradicted customary tenure systems for deciding how access to land and associated resources should be allocated. The Land Use Act (otherwise known as the Land Use Decree) promulgated by the military government of General Obasanjo in 1978 remains one of the most controversial legislations made in Nigeria because it alienated indigenous people from land, a major means of livelihood. For example, the law vested all lands in Nigeria in the State, while section 43 of the 1979 Constitution vests all mineral wealth in Nigeria in the Federal Government (Dule and Nwankwo 2001).

Embedded in the Land Use Act is the notion of eminent domain- a centralized administrative control of land where by all land rights are vested in the State, with the law being nationally applicable. Emergence of statutory tenure systems based on statutory code drawn by the Federal government that reflect values and interests of the State is a corollary of the centralization process. Due to different origins and principles upon which customary and statutory tenure systems are based, they produce differing practice on ground, and together constitute a set of overlapping and often contradictory mechanisms for deciding how access to land and resources should be allocated. Customary tenure systems are more functional in communities where oil has not been

discovered or exploitation activities essentially take place offshore. This is because of intense competition for land between the oil industry and communities since oil production started in the Delta in 1958. After decades of competition, the communities are evidently losing out more land to multinational oil companies.

This study examines the dialectical relations between land, oil and resource dependence. Crucial to this arena of research is the history and contemporary configurations of land and oil politics, forest and local livelihood. Section 28 (2) of the land Use Act states that the right of occupancy can be revoked for requirement of land for mining purposes; section 28 (3)(b) gives the same conditions for revocation of a customary right of occupancy; while the Petroleum Act of 1969 made provision for acquisition of Right of Way (ROW) for oil pipelines. The land Use Act and Petroleum Act are thus instruments of land and resource dispossession. Evidence of this is increasing physical space occupied by multinational oil companies just as community space may shrink unabated. The combined effect of these laws in the Delta is the perception of transformation from foreign imperialism to local colonization. I argue that global Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), corporate and State inspired community-based conservation projects are to attenuate popular pressures over resource denial. Resource conservation then becomes a solution to livelihood problematic. My first research question uses the predominance of oil in the political economy to investigate how oil shape access to land and resource in Akassa clan.

While Akassa development project has been applauded for adopting local solutions to solve local problems predicated on participatory approaches, I contend that the goal of the project is to assuage or mitigate discontent of local communities over development deficits which result in disruption of oil flows. Consequently this study locates community resource conservation project at the conjecture of corporate development strategy dynamics and wider political-economic forces of State, and the possibilities this offers in fostering participatory development. My second research question uses corporate development as an entry point for exploring how corporate philanthropy shapes the possibilities of participatory development and, how community-based conservation project is a process for securing social license for multinational oil companies operations.

Management of natural resources is a realm of serious political power because it involves crucial economic and livelihood decisions (Feryetabend and Tarnowski 2005). An important challenge is how best to develop inclusive and conflict free resource management model. My third research question uses the theory of decentralization of powers as an entry point in exploring how turn over of discretionary powers over resources from indigenous political leadership to lower levels forest institutions created and reinforced class hegemony.

The central objective of this research is to produce a coherent analysis and suggest program of action relevant to achievement of goals and draw attention to implementation and action that may allow policy makers and implementers make better judgement as to which course of action to follow. This central objective has been broken as follows: a) to show how agitations of decades of neglect, and environmental degradation associated

with oil exploration and exploitation shape community development projects and are shaped by corporate development strategy b) how practice of devolution of powers over resource management reinforced the hegemony of the ruling class, and c) donor dependent implications of community conservation projects.

2) Context.

The colonial State through the policy of Indirect Rule established territorial control by forming alliance with paramount chiefs in whom land ownership and authority were vested as instrument of colonial power. In practice, the powers exercised by customary authorities were often circumscribed by the colonial State via gazetting of forest reserves and establishment of mining concessions. Oil prospecting activities started in 1938 when Shell d'Arcy was granted exploration license covering the entire area of Nigeria of 950,530 square kilometers. Shell d'Arcy which later became Shell-BP and Royal/Dutch Shell maintained monopoly over Nigeria's oil resources for almost two decades. The first oil well in Nigeria was drilled in 1958 at Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa state where commercial quantity was first found. In 1965 Chevron (former Gulf oil) commenced production of its off shore field at Okan, while Elf and Agip joined the oil industry in 1966. At present there are more than eleven oil multinationals in Nigeria operating over 159 oil fields and producing from over 1481 oil wells all of which is almost exclusively in the Niger Delta (Dule and Nwankwo, 2001).

Today, Shell's oil mining lease cover 31,103 sq kilometers, a little less than half of the 70,000 sq kilometers of the Niger Delta. Shell Petroleum Development Company(SPDC) also has 391 producing oil wells, linked by a net work of 4,786 km of field pipelines and 154 km of trunk lines to 87 flow stations all located in the same Niger Delta (Dule and Nwankwo,2001). The implication that flows from this is that more than ninety percent of SPDC's oil is pumped from on shore concessions, unlike the other oil multinationals that operate off shore or have relatively small on shore operations. It is thus evident that the oil industry's demand on land is immense. For most local people, seismic surveys means invasion of their communities because it entails clearing paths in forests for access and firing explosives. Impacts from drilling and field development include land take for access and locations and flaring of gas, disposal of wastes, chemicals and sludge and spills. "Spills are uncontrolled releases of any product including crude oil, chemicals, or waste caused by equipment failure, operation mishaps, human error or intentional damage to facilities. The extent of damage depends on what, where and how much has been spilled and how long it remains there"(ibid).

Land Use and oil production activities are governed by a number of laws.¹ Prior to these legal regimes, oil multinationals recognized indigenous communities as land owners hence negotiated terms of payment of rent with communities on whose land they operate. The laws mean loss of revenue as oil multinationals ceased payment of rent to communities. Apart from loss of oil rent, communities suffer loss of economic activities

¹ The Land Use Act of 1979, Petroleum Act of 1969, Oil pipelines Act, and Section 43 of the 1979 Constitution.

emanating from pollution that affected traditional fishing and dislodgement from land used for farming. Yet these are not adequately addressed by either the compensation paid or the system of paying compensation. As unemployment accelerated, general standard of living began to decline significantly, and environmental degradation assumed epidemic dimensions, a crop of militant youths emerge to protest marginalization and poverty. The oil industry has been severely hit by this new wave of protest as vandalization of oil facilities, rig blockade, kidnapping of expatriate and national staff, and shut down of facilities are regularly carried out.

It is within this historical context that multinational oil companies embraced the concept of corporate social responsibility in dealing with “host community”.² The concept of Social Responsibility in business is now subsumed under sustainable development which has become a dominant discourse for anything remotely environmental. In response to their operational environment and as part of supposed policy transformatory process, multinational oil companies began to take responsibility for a wide range of social and economic needs through projects that aim to reduce hardship inflicted on humans, the environment and livelihood productivity (Peterside 2004). I contend that there is need to approach the study dialectically, situating our analysis in the broader conjecture of its intersection with political and socio economic pressures within the Nigerian state to illuminate the conflictual terrain that shape community-based conservation.

3) Research Questions and Hypotheses.

This study is an attempt to establish the sophisticated connections between land, oil and livelihood. The specific case I use to illustrate connections is the Akassa Community Forests Management and Development Plan. I will conduct an in-depth historical engagement of discourses surrounding these issues to provide a broad foundation in understanding how the plan is an outcome of land and oil politics. The research design for each hypothesis is located in section 8.

Hypothesis: 1

I argue that local groups have responded to livelihood problematic by asserting claims to land and resource based identities with demands for greater recognition of their economic and social needs. Corporate organizations, global Non-Governmental Organizations, donor agencies, and the State appear to support these resource claims by encouraging design and implementation of community-based conservation projects. My first hypotheses is:

The tendency to propagate community-based conservation project by alliance of multinational oil companies, global NGOs, donors and the State is geared towards securing social license to operate.

² Corporate Social Responsibility means that oil companies are responsible not just for the way in which they do business but also for the consequences of their business practice, where-ever they occur whether intended or not (Sklair 2003).

The Land Use Act is infested with ambiguities and contradictions. Judicial interpretation of different sections, words and phrases contain-therein have resulted in legal battles often going as far as the Supreme Court. Equally odious are the arbitrary powers regarding such issues as grant and revocation of rights of occupancy, quantum of damages payable by government for compulsory acquisition of lands, designation of lands as urban or non-urban, duration of certificate of occupancy, often determined capriciously and without any objective criteria. The consequence of this arbitrariness is that power to determine these issues, are in most cases abused to the detriment of communities. Denied of any significant benefit by the legal regimes governing oil production activities (the Mineral Act, Petroleum Act, Oil Pipelines Act, section 43 of the 1979 constitution), communities perceptions of injustice has grown increasingly acute. Furthermore, environmental degradation emanating essentially from oil exploration and exploitation activities (gas flares and oil spills) destroy traditional means of livelihood causing long term deprivation; the political system at both local and national levels fail to deliver any form of sustainable development for majority of the population resulting in erosion of a social contract. Consequently multinational oil companies are being viewed as quasi state that should deliver where the State has failed since they operate in joint ventures with the State and are present in remote areas where the State is absent developmentally.

I argue that the perception of quasi-State status of multinational oil companies escalated conflict between oil companies and local communities. To explore if and how this conflictual relations shape Akassa Community Forests Management and Development Plan, require inquiry in to how claims over land and other resource are central to the political landscape corporate development strategy encountered.

Evaluating hypothesis :1 requires evidence demonstrating connections between land, oil politics and resource conservation. I seek to study the socio-political context in which the plan was formulated and adopted.

Hypothesis: 2

I argue that poverty and dearth of infrastructure shape confrontations between communities and multinational oil companies that has invariably affected oil business thus giving rise to new set of business practices in the form of “a new kind of corporate philanthropy”. The acclaimed strength of this phenomenon is investment in local community development projects such as community-based resource conservation. My second hypotheses is:

Akassa Community forests Management and Development Plan (a sub area of Akassa Development project) is a process to shield multinational oil companies from negative forces in their areas of operation.

One old established way in which business organizations traditionally express corporate citizenship has been philanthropic contributions to communities in which they originated and/or their major facilities are located. This has become globalize practice when it

expands in geographical and social scope. This implies that transnational corporations take responsibility not only for the home base, but also for places overseas where the corporations' product and influence reach. Yet multinational oil companies operating in Nigeria's Niger delta have failed to provide social amenities in their areas of operation. When they try to assume this role, their policies have often been misguided and not focused on sustainable development of communities. The resultant protests by community members are often met with repression by the State at the companies' invitation, and this reinforces the perception of symbiosis between the oil multinationals and the State.

The crises of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta have been costly when account is taken of destruction of oil infrastructure, lives and man-hours dissipated in conflicts. More important to the State and the multinational oil companies is loss of revenue associated with disruption of oil flows. To survive, oil multinationals seem to have opted to invest in community development to help reduce hardship in the region. Consonant with this view, Zalik (2004) demonstrates how the Niger Delta conflict dynamics created a new development model known as partnership development through oil majors and aid industry synergy. I aim to deepen corporate development strategy discourse by arguing that Akassa conservation project is a) a response to correct the "erroneous impression" that oil multinationals succumb only to violent agitations by rewarding communities with development projects b) a process to change the mind set of communities against the companies, and reassure host communities that there is benefit in partnering which can only be obtained through peaceful co-existence and. c) expected to result in conducive business environment. To explore this hypothesis I will study perceptions of customary authorities, local government officials, women and youth leaders, project officials and general community members about remote and immediate motivations for the project.

Hypothesis: 3

I contend that two critical issues confronted by facilitators of the Akassa forests plan, was first, how the traditional political leadership could devolve responsibility for forests management without forfeiting the privileges associated with ownership and control and, second, ensure participatory management. My third hypothesis is:

The project seems to have resolved the dilemma of ownership and control, and participatory management with policy of decentralization, yet crafted process rules that reinforce class hegemony.

The socio-political and economic characteristics of Akassa clan created systems by which people gain access to land and manage other resource. The clan is composed of communities and compounds, while the traditional political governance institution is hierarchically organized. At the apex of the political structure (chieftaincy institution) is the Amanyanabo who is a natural ruler. Next in the hierarchy are compound chiefs whose members trace their origin to a common ancestor. Ownership of land and other resource is vested in the family that has a chief as its head. The chief in consultation with elders of

his compound administers the resource vested in him. Thus, logging and canoe carving rights are granted loggers and carvers by the compound chiefs of the families that own the land and other resource they wish to exploit. Theoretically, the beauty of the Akassa model lies in its policy of devolution of powers and responsibilities over natural resource management from indigenous political governance institution to lower levels institutions created by Akassa conservation project. My research will seek to investigate how a) the principle of devolution of powers produced opportunity for a new form of development (participatory management of resource) b) interaction between customary tenure system and the new forests institutions shape project effectiveness c) how the project created new class and reinforce that already in existence and, d) promote donor dependent development.

4) Theoretical Framework.

Political Economy

The theoretical foundation for this research is political economy and its intersection with three areas of scholarship to which I will contribute i) Political ecology ii) Discourse of common property regimes and iii) Corporate development strategy.

The political economy theoretical framework linked environment and development by arguing for the need to set environmental resources and resource use in a social, political and economic context (Blakie, 1985). Although differences exist among theorists, yet there are some commonalities. For instance, Adams (1990) agrees with Blakie (1985) that essentially green development has to be about political economy, about distribution of power, and not about environmental quality. Peluso (1992) an adherent of radical political economy school of thought contends that to locate forest degradation in appropriate perspective, our analysis must begin with several questions about the broader political economy. Such questions include: what is the nature of the state power in managing resources? What are the material interests and ideologies of government organizations and individual agents of the state seeking control of these resources? These questions are the building blocks of analysis of the nuances of control and resistance.

a) Political Ecology

The discursive terrain of radical political economy has been expanded by political ecology through a body of scholarship that theorize the” causal connections between the logics and dynamics of capitalist growth and specific environmental outcomes” (Peet and Watts, 1996: 13). The debates evolve around efforts at re-theorization of political economy and environment at several but different levels. The theoretical debates must not detain us here, but it is pertinent to note attempts at harnessing specific concepts derived from political economy to establish linkage between nature and society. The radical political economy framework that embraces political ecology will be adopted for this study because such synergy provides a ready tool for deeper penetration of social phenomena. A major contribution of my study to political ecology scholarship that has hardly been considered in political ecology literature is the role other resources

(particularly oil) besides forests and land play in the management decisions about or governance of forests and land. Consequently, I seek to study the Akassa Forest management and development plan with particular attention to the historical process in which the plan makers and other interests interact to produce outcomes that may be at variance with their intentions.

b) Discourse of Common Property Regimes.

As resources become scarce and hence more valuable, there is bound to be more competition among users for access. There are legal and administrative frameworks dealing with natural resources. Consensus is yet to emerge as to whether these legal and administrative frameworks promote equitable access and control. For example, in Nigeria the Land Use Act enacted by the Federal Government reflects the values and interests of an overbearing State. As a result, the law may lack legitimacy at the community level, and must therefore rely on enforcement by agents of the State. This has often resulted in contradictory mechanisms for deciding how access to resources should be allocated. Ribot and Peluso (2003) conceptualize access as the ability to benefit from things as material objects, persons, institutions and symbols. In a broad context, access includes a wider range of social relationships that constrain or enable benefits from resource use than property relations. The authors further contended that people and institutions are differently positioned in relation to resources due to changing conditions that shift and change overtime changing the nature of form of access to resources.

Common property resources are under great pressure, particularly in densely populated areas, because they remain of great importance for certain kinds of production systems and for certain social groups. The term common property resource is subject to ambiguity in usage. To overcome this problem, Schlager and Ostrom (1992) developed a conceptual scheme that sought to address an array of property rights that distinguish among bundles of rights that may be used by the users of a resource system. Identified property rights range from authorized user to claimant, to proprietor, and to owner. More important is that for every right an individual holds rules exist that authorize particular actions in exercising that property right.

In regard to common pool resources, Schlager and Ostrom (1992) contend that the most relevant operational level property rights are 'access' and 'withdrawal' rights. Access within this context is defined as the right to enter a defined physical property whereas withdrawal is the right to obtain the product of a resource. Interestingly rules specify the requirement the resource user must meet in order to exercise this right. Individuals who have access and withdrawal rights may or may not have more extensive rights authorizing participation in collective choice. Operational rules are changed by collective choice actions – rules that specify who may participate in changing operational rules and the level of agreement required for their change. The heart of the matter is the difference between exercising a right and participating in the definition of future operational level rights. I seek to move beyond theorizing to explore how the Land Use Act created new power relations and political economy that dialectically shape the political landscape in which access and withdrawal rights are defined.

There is a real danger of worsening social conflict and degradation fueled by over-exploitation of natural resources. Hence there is need to evolve resource management mechanisms that could arrest decline in future of resources that may risk fostering conflict. For the mechanisms to attain set objectives, they must be community-based. A resource management system only qualifies as community-based if the rules for resource allocation and 'management' are set primarily though not exclusively by communities themselves (Lynch and Talbott, 1995). The foregoing calls for participatory management of natural resources an approach that describes a situation in which social actors with specific interest and concern about a set of material resources are involved in its management in a substantial way. Feyerabend and Taronwski (2005) argue that participatory management is a partnership among social actors with legitimate interests, capacities, and commitment regarding the natural resources of the state. The terms of partnership specify management functions of the actors and guarantees their benefits and costs, as well as rights and responsibilities.

Participatory management resembles collaborative, joint and community-based management. Point of interest is each of these discourses arose out of a much greater concern for the rural poor and disenchantment with large scale, top- bottom, centrally planned and managed development projects. Donors such as World Bank and some global NGOs have embraced the community as a basic unit of environmental planning and project implementation. I argue that participatory management is a product of dialogue and consensus within the community and between segments of community population. These fundamental ingredients require a stable environment to flourish but oil politics has fuelled inter and intra-community conflicts creating deep-seated animosities that makes dialogue among community members almost impossible.³ Furthermore, it is apposite to investigate how the political-economic contexts under which the plan was produced and implemented changed enough to encourage the under privileged to participate in Akassa conservation project.

Failure of most conservation schemes necessitated scholars and policy makers reconsideration of the role of community in resource management strategies and plan development. Current discourse governing community- based conservation policy emphasizes the role of community in bringing about decentralization, meaningful participation, and effective conservation (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). A major limitation of the renewed interests in community as potent variable in conservation schemes is, the concept of community is rarely defined or carefully examined by scholars and policy-makers concerned with resource use and management. The consequence of this is the tendency for conservation policies to fail for lack of conceptual clarity. To overcome this shortcoming, a more political approach to conservation will suffice. That is, in regard to conservation, community must be examined by focusing on the multiple interests and

³ Nigerian Agip Oil Company has a flow station at Tebidaba from where a pipe- line is laid through Akassa territory to Brass. There is Texaco facility offshore, which pumps its oil to a storage Vessel- M. V. Oloibiri. Also, Statoil intends to start offshore oil wells exploration on Akassa Sea in 2006.

actors within and on how these actors influence decision-making as well as the internal and external institutions that shape the decision making process (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). I will examine to what extent Akassa forests plan reflects the socio-political realities of the community and its implications for project outcomes.

c) Corporate Development Strategy

Globalization has encouraged scholarship that extended the frontiers of discourse beyond the international system of state to wider and deeper levels analysis to understanding world dynamics. Within this context, Nation States though important part of world system, the tendency has been to focus on transnational forces⁴, processes, and institutions, not based on the State due to its changing role. The drivers of this role change are transnational corporations and transnational capitalist class. Shaken by the tragic execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists, transnational oil corporations operating in Nigeria's Niger Delta adopted theory of corporate citizenship to denote their commitment to host community.⁵ The philosophical premise of this body of scholarship derives from the fact that those who own and control these corporate organizations are citizens who may be affected by the adverse effects of activities of the corporations. Thus corporate citizenship connotes both a high level of morality and civic responsibility. Sklair (2001) argues that corporations are forced to be good corporate citizens because they operate within strict regulatory regimes imposed by local, national and international government authority. I seek to move beyond Sklair's theorizing to show that the mono-economy of the Nigerian State is largely under the sway of transnational corporations which are for the most part more powerful economically than the State deploying their international power structure, which enable them to elude any effective State control and to circumvent or even neutralize domestic economic measures.

The Niger Delta situation has shown that conflict and poverty have negative consequences for multinational oil business and this has given rise to a new set of strategies that assumed the form of corporate philanthropy. The crux of this philosophy of development is an attempt to increase corporations' values by shielding them from a multitude of negative forces by engaging in local community development. Although Barnes (2005) contends that this new type of corporate social development should not be confused with old-style company philanthropy which certainly continues yet, failed to show in what respect the new corporate philanthropy is similar or different from old style company philanthropy. I draw from this argument to inquire the differences between old and new corporate development strategy through comparative analysis of project contents to demonstrate, that whatever change there may be is a change in form but not in essence. Multinational Oil companies as business concerns are interested in generating profits for their shareholders and this serves no public interest directly because this untamed profit motive puts strain on the environment. This perception of tension that pervades corporate social responsibility literature is yet to be critically examined. For instance, stakeholders

⁴ Transnational forces refers to processes and institutions that cuts across borders but do not derive their power and authority from the State (Sklair 2001).

⁵ Shell's 1998 Report claims that transformation of its corporate development policy began in 1994, predating the Ogoni crises.

in Niger Delta development process have varied interests: For investors, business growth and competitive return are paramount; For employees, self fulfillment and competitive welfare package form the focus; Communities wish to have individual empowerment, sustainable economic development and clean environment; Rating agencies are keen on companies' positive impact on the environment and community; while Human rights groups show interest in a lot of issues including labour practices, gender discrimination, environmental pollution, e.t.c. These concerns have to be incorporated in the day-to-day decisions and activities of business to ensure corporate survival. Reconciliation of the contradictory interests of all stakeholders is an aspect of the Niger Delta problematic. I examine the extent to which Akassa conservation project reconciles the seeming irreconcilable interests of stakeholders.

The corporate initiatives may be enough to convince the international public that oil companies are committed to public good, and in many cases this may be all they are intended to achieve. Of note however, is the phenomenon of corporate philanthropy intensifies local-corporate relationships. To some extent, it provides avenue for multinational oil companies to become integrated in to the civic and social fabric in which they operate. This raises the question of form(s) of governance conducive for corporate development. In this respect, Evans (2002) argues that creation of collaborative arrangements through State-civil society synergies possesses the potential for improved policy outcomes. He holds the view that the core for this form of governance lies in constructing productive relationships between communities, NGOs, political parties, the State, and other actors to address social and environmental issues. I argue that Evans' conceptualization is germane for exploring the Akassa project created and promoted by alliance of Statoil/ other oil companies, the State, PNI and donor agencies. Perhaps, it is against this backdrop that Barnes (2005), notes:

Corporate philanthropy does have the power to provide greater benefits to recipients, and it does offer some solutions to problems of development.

I draw from this claim to inquire how beneficiaries of corporate philanthropy perceive this brand of development especially how it meets local needs (such as community conservation project) and, forms of governance thrown up by old and new corporate philanthropy. I contend that the practice of corporate philanthropy assume the forms of welfare handouts that are not proportional to environmental damage caused by oil exploration and exploitation, fails to deal with power question associated with community development projects, and creates donor dependent development. However, multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta have used promises of community development to compete with one another and to attract international attention.

5) Study Setting

Akassa is located in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The State was one of six states created by the military administration of the late General Sani Abacha in October 1, 1996 from the old Rivers State with Yenegoa as the capital. Its name is an

acronym of names of three of the then Rivers State's Local Government Areas (Brass, Yenagoa and Sagbama). It is located within latitude 04-15" North, 05.23" South and longitude 05.22" West and 06.45" East and the Atlantic Ocean on the West and South. Its population is estimated at about 2 million. It is culturally heterogeneous with the main cultural groups being Ijaw (Ijaw), Nembe, Ogbia and Epie-Atissa. Minor cultural groups include Urhobo in Ofoni and Isoko (Osekenewe) in Sagbama Local Government Area. The people of the State practice mainly farming and fishing, and Christianity, Islam and Traditional African religions.

Bayelsa State is essentially characterized by tropical rainforest traversed by big Rivers and bounded on the West and South by the Atlantic Ocean. In other words, a much bigger part of its land is swampy. The forests of Akassa is located on "three sand barrier islands" on the Bight of Bonny, and are separated from each other by substantial rivers especially Ohoniweitoru, Nun, and Brass. The clan territory spans an area of 450 km² at the base of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The territory includes major estuaries of the River Niger from East to West: these are the Nun River, the Sangama River and the Fishtown River. It has an adjacent sea area within Nigerian territorial waters of approximately 9600 km² and runs inland from the Atlantic Sea board of three beach ridge islands between Brass Estuary and the Fishtown.

Akassa shares boundaries with other communities in the state such as Logbia (Lugubia) in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area to the North-East, Nembe in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State to the North, Lima and Egwema communities of Brass Local Government Area to the West, and the vast Atlantic Seaboard to the South (ACDP, NDWC and PNI 2005).

The people of Akassa like other Ijaw communities, practice mainly Christianity and traditional African religion. The main occupation of the people is subsistence fishing and rice farming, the latter is of recent origin. Fishing is carried out principally on the estuaries, creeks and adjoining ocean. Other significant economic activities include lumbering, canoe carving, firewood extraction, and harvesting of non-timber products such as snails, honey, ropes, palm wine (from which local gin is distilled), oil palm fruits, chewing-sticks among others. The family is major source of labour supply, division of labour is determined by gender and age. Although the family is the basic unit of production, labour is sometimes hired for fishing and related operations for which remuneration is either in cash (for boat building and bush clearing for farming) or on a shared basis (especially for fishing). The main family economic activities are categorized as "Men's Activities, Women's Activities, and Children's Activities" (ACDP, NDWC and PNI 2005). The political system at both local and national levels failed to provide any form of sustainable development for majority of the population. Consequently Akassa is characterized by either absence of essential infrastructure or mass of abandoned project-product of improper development planning. The clan is yet to be linked by road, railway or air travel just as telecommunications or functional postal facilities are not available. However, there is a postal agency that shares office building with the local police station, and a small private radio communication post located in the palace of the Paramount Ruler of Akassa clan. Other communication facilities in the area are owned and operated

by Agip- a multinational oil company. To access medical facility, the people had to do three to five hours journey by local transport boats to Brass- headquarter of the local government area.

Previous attempts by government to provide portable drinking water and electricity failed to bear desired fruits. Three abandoned water projects in Ereweibie and Erewei-Kongho and collapse of many electricity schemes(with 500KVA generating sets) with a distributional network that covered Erewei-Kongho, Ereweibie, Kotikiri and Bekekiri communities are cardinal evidence. Community -sponsored electricity projects, like their government owned counter parts, collapsed partly due to lack of logistic support from government and relevant stakeholders. The first primary school in Akassa, Bishop Crowther Memorial School was established in 1947 by the Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Communion, interestingly number of primary schools has increased through government efforts. There are two secondary schools in the clan. Both primary and secondary schools are “grossly under-staffed”, school enrolment and attendance rate is low because labour of children is required in house hold local production activities, while basic instructional materials and facilities for teaching of science and demonstration of scientific experiments are not available.(ACDP, NDWC and PNI 2005). This chaotic state of infrastructural development accounts for why Niger Delta’s huge oil and gas endowment is a very strong thread of attraction and contention between various interests. For example, in December 1998, youth drawn from over 40 Ijaw Subgroups met in Kaiama, Bayelsa State to proclaim what is now known as the ‘Kaiama Declaration’. This declaration represents the beginning of concerted opposition to multinational oil companies and the Nigerian State whom the youth accused of Balkanization, political domination and internal colonization of the Ijaw.

Both customary and statutory tenure systems exist in the Niger Delta. The former is more functional in remote areas such as Akassa with a territory that spans an area of 450 meters at the base of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Akassa has vast natural resource base that include rainforest, mangrove swamp forests and brackish water/fresh water transition forests and associated flora and fauna. The forests have provided the base for lumbering, canoe carving and related crafts, traditional medicine, food and food additives, hunting and fibre-related gathering. Thus livelihoods of the majority of the population will continue to depend on utilization of natural resources.

The main natural resources of the mangrove area are the mangrove trees that are seriously exploited as firewood for household use, commercial fish drying, and with cultivation of rice in recent times the mangrove swamps have come under great threat. The forests presently exhibit symptoms of severe over-exploitation and thus close to passing into a state of terminal exhaustion. The considerable growth of population and advent of reliable technology (power saws), and attendant public commercial transportation systems encouraged massive exploitation of forest resources. Access to land and other renewable natural resources (such as forests) derives from membership in community

usually defined in terms of kinship or derived rights,⁶ through arrangements with those holding primary rights. Consequently, lumbering and canoe carving rights are granted to lumberjacks and canoe carvers by compound chiefs whose family forests they wish to exploit. Local women have free access to an array of natural fibers that they exploit for basketry and weaving; and to mangroves – the wood they use for cooking and fish drying. As timber and non-timber resources⁷ become scarce and hence more valuable, competition amongst users for access becomes inevitable. For instance, intensive use of timber conflict with the interests of canoe carvers who need fairly large trees for production. There is also conflict between these two uses of the timber and that of tala for palm-wine seasoning. Under this circumstance it is important that there be a clear set of procedures and mechanisms by which such and related conflicts may be resolved to avoid long and protracted disputes capable of developing into violence in a conflict-ridden environment.

6) Research Preparation.

In May 2003, CASS management received the mandate of its Board of Directors to revitalize the applied research component of CASS program of activities and to begin to do so with deliberate focus on the Niger Delta Area, at a time of rising political and social activism and incendiary unrest in the area, fuelled by deepening deficits in accountability and transparency in governance. This proposal derives from my study of Akassa Development Project (ADP) facilitated by Pro-Natura International (PNI)-Nigeria which started in August 2003 through a project funded by the Centre for Advanced Social Science (CASS), Port Harcourt – Nigeria. My invitation to participate in the project was informed by the centre's desire to select from the best researchers the country can boast of in terms of reputation for high quality scholarship, tested experience and versatile research skills in undertaking sensitive and pioneering research. My Bachelior Degree thesis and Ph.D dissertation were written on the Niger Delta. Under the CASS project my objectives were to identify both national and International Development agencies operating in the Niger Delta and examine the extent to which they meet the development needs of the people of the area.

This year, I made three trips to Akassa in the months of May and June this time focusing on the implementation of Akassa Forests Management and Development Plan. Out of the 19 settlements that make up Akassa clan I visited 13 settlements. I will select 12 settlements as my study sites. I have established cordial relationship with the traditional and political elites, Akassa Development Foundation officials, settlements leaders and residents. I have so far conducted 10 interviews with officials of Pro-Natura International

⁶ Kinship is a cultural system whereby social identity derives from membership of a group who trace their origin or descent to a common ancestor, and this membership or arrangement with members of a group provides access to land and resource.

⁷ The forester for purposes of management, usually groups forests resources in to two categories, namely forest products (wood and timber) and minor forest product(all non-timber products). A major consequence of this classification is the tendency to confer lower status to non-timber forest products (Obot 2002).

(PNI) Nigeria, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSOs) attached to the Akassa project and ADP officers. I have thus established necessary contacts for the study. In addition, my pioneering membership of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) will enhance response and confidence of respondents in the study. I also maintain regular contacts with civil society network in the area through the monthly CASS Development Round Table on the Niger Delta.

I have observed meetings of the nine institutions created by ADF namely Akassa National Council of Chiefs, Akassa Clan Women Association, Akassa Youth Association, Akassa Clan Development Council, Akassa National Education Consultative Committee, Akassa National Health Consultative Committee, Akassa National Savings Association, Akassa National Resources Unit, and Akassa National Skill Training and Resource Centre Committee. I have also established cordial working relationship with Ijaw Council for Human Rights and top officials of PNI that enable me gain access to internal documents such as the Akassa Community forests Management and Development Plan. Furthermore, based on thought provoking discussions with scholars in UC Berkeley, I believe this research will contribute to political ecology debates.

7) Research Method And Duration of Study.

This is a traditional research project that observes change and history and reports the implications to the community and other stakeholders. Thus I will conduct an in-depth examination of the dialectical relations between land and oil politics and resource conservation. I will seek relation of this at three levels to examine my hypotheses. That is to show how land and oil politics shape corporate development as a means of securing social license to operate (hypothesis 1), I will interrogate how Niger Delta conflict dynamics seem to have altered corporate development strategy and how this get translated to a process to shield multinational oil companies from negative forces in operational environment (hypothesis 2). To establish this claim, I will explore community members’ perceptions about corporate development initiative and indices used in measuring project outcomes. To establish contradictions of corporate development strategy, I will examine how implementation process of community-based conservation project accentuates power imbalances by reinforcing class hegemony (hypothesis 3). And finally to explore how the project have modified access rules and resource management and how constrains have shaped donor dependent development.

Phase1 Jan-Feb.	Phase 2 March-April.	Phase 3 May-June.	Phase 4 July-Sept.	Phase 5 October-November.
Selection and training of field assistants. Design of research instruments. Selection of study sites.	Library and archival search. In-depth interviews of donors, facilitators, community, youth, women leaders, etc.	Field survey in 12settlements(10 respondents from each settlement). Observation of project implementation. Follow-up interviews.	Repot writing. Presentation of draft report at CASS Round Table for comments and inputs.	Presentation of final report at CASS. Circulation of reports to ADP, PNI, donors and other partners. Submission of final report to UC Berkeley.

8) Research Design: Questions, Evidence Required And Methods.

Table 1

RQ 1: What are the connections between land, oil politics and resource conservation?	
Hypothesis 1: The tendency to propagate community based conservation project by alliance of multinational oil companies, global NGOs, donors and the State is geared towards securing social license to operate.	
Evidence Required	Methods
How do land and oil politics shape the context that produced Akassa conservation project?	Literature review of scholarship analyzing the impact of the Land Use Act, Petroleum Act, Oil Pipelines Act, section 43 of the 1979 Constitution, Environmental impact of oil exploration and exploitation on livelihood.
To what extent is the project prompted by donors' and State's economic and political interests?	Literature review of scholarship analyzing background of MNOCs, donors and State policies in relation to development of oil producing communities. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with community elites and leaders of civil society, State and local government officials.
Has oil created governability crisis in Akassa?	Literature review of scholarship, Human rights reports, newspapers and magazine reports, and government bulletins on oil induced conflicts in the Niger Delta. In-depth Interviews: Semi structured interviews with customary authorities, women and youth leaders, and local government officials. Survey: conduct a survey of 120 randomly selected respondents (10 from each of the 12 settlements selected as study sites)

Table 2

RQ 2: How is Niger Delta conflict dynamics altering corporate development strategy?	
Hypothesis 2: Akassa forests conservation project (a sub area of Akassa Development project) is a process to shield multinational oil companies from negative forces in their areas of operation.	
Evidence Required	Methods
How does the threat to oil flows shape corporate development strategy?	<p>Literature reviews: Explore scholarship on corporate development strategy paying particular attention to how hostile business environment has given rise to philosophical transformations with reference to Niger Delta.</p> <p>In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with officials of multinational oil companies in- charge of community/sustainable development, civil society groups involved in development works in the Delta, and officials of State development interventionist agencies(such as Niger Delta Development Commission-NDDC).</p>
How do community members perceive corporate development?	<p>In-depth Interviews: semi-structured interviews of project leaders (Community Development Committees-CDC, ADP Board members), women and youth groups, customary authorities and religious leaders to establish their perceptions on community-based corporate development projects.</p> <p>Survey: Carryout a survey of 120 respondents from 12 settlements to establish general community members’ perceptions about the projects.</p>
How is the conservation project funded?	<p>In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with officials of the facilitating NGO (Pro-Natura International), community/sustainable development officials of MNOCs, and officers and Board members of ADP.</p> <p>Print Materials: Annual/progress reports of ADP, multinational oil companies and donor agencies.</p>
What are the indices used in measuring project outcomes?	<p>Print Materials: Explore facilitating NGO, MNOCs annual reports and ADP quarterly reports in the project’s newspaper (Atlantic Express).</p>

Table 3 RQ 3:How did the project facilitators create an enabling environment that produced participatory management of forests resource?

Hypothesis 3: The project seems to have resolved the dilemma of ownership and control, and participatory management with policy of decentralization yet crafted process rules that reinforce class hegemony.

Evidence Required	Methods
<p>How did the plan process resolve the question of power imbalance in community development efforts?</p>	<p>Literature review: Explore scholarship of debates on community as a basic unit of environmental planning and implementation, participatory community development process paying particular attention to discourse on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA),</p> <p>Print Materials: ADP concept paper, PNI progress reports and ADP Natural Resource management plan.</p> <p>In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with women and youth leaders, customary authorities, members of CDCs and project facilitators.</p>
<p>How did the history of indigenous socio-political organization shape management of resource?</p>	<p>Archival Material: Explore scholarship on the social and political history of the Ijaws with specific emphasis about rules of customary/ indigenous management of resource.</p> <p>In depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with customary authorities, elites, women and youth leaders to establish the historical foundation of resource management and how modern influence has shaped current practices.</p>

<p>How did the conservation project alter customary/indigenous management?</p>	<p>Print Material: Conduct critical analysis of Akassa Community Forests Management and Development Plan to a) establish new forest institutions created by the project b) compare the levels of hierarchy of the new institutions with the customary/indigenous management systems and c) show how the new rules shape resource governability and donor dependent development.</p> <p>In-depth interviews: Semi Structured interviews with customary authorities, women and youth leaders, ADP officials, political elites, professional loggers to establish their views and feelings about the conservation project.</p> <p>Survey: Conduct survey of 120 respondents in the 12 selected study sites to establish a general views and feelings about the new forest rules particularly implications for livelihood.</p>
<p>How did the new forest rules leverage indigenous ruling class over resource governability?</p>	<p>Print Material : Explore how plan’s access and process rules a) contradicted the essence of participatory management b) reinforced ruling class hegemony and c) created a new class (ADP bureaucrats).</p>

Abbreviations.

- ACDP = Akassa Community Development Project.
- ADF = Akassa Development Foundation.
- ADP = Akassa Development Project.
- CASS= Centre for Advanced Social Science.
- CDCs= Community Development Committees.
- MNOCs = Multinational Oil Companies.
- NDWC = Niger Delta Wetland Centre.
- NGOs = Non-Governmental Organizations.
- PNI = Pro-Natura International.
- SPDC= Shell Petroleum Development Company.

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