

Community Development (CD) in Petroleum Industry of South Sudan: A Contextual Review

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Abstract

Community Development (CD), though a crucial element within the petroleum industry, has historically been neglected and insufficiently studied, particularly in relation to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This disregard has led to CD initiatives being implemented remotely, with limited effectiveness. In South Sudan, despite having a mature and robust petroleum sector operating through three Joint Operating Companies (JOCs) in blocks 3 & 7, 1, 2 & 4, and 5A, CD programs and projects have largely employed a non-participatory (top-down) approach. As a result, communities often fail to take ownership of projects, leading to unsustainable development and eventual collapse of initiatives. The study emphasizes the importance of a participatory (bottom-up) model in which communities are at the core of all petroleum industry processes—from exploration, appraisal, development, and drilling, to production and decommissioning. The proposed model advocates for comprehensive community consultation and positions Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as the central methodology. PRA enables communities to identify, prioritize, and address their most pressing issues through the creation and execution of a Community Action Plan (CAP). Using a case study approach, the research examined CD departments across all JOCs in South Sudan. It concludes that while the petroleum industry is capital-intensive, it is equally people-intensive and must be led by the communities themselves. It further recommends that Community Development Committees (CDCs) be directly elected and managed by locals, free from political influence, to ensure effective, inclusive, and sustainable development.

Keywords: South Sudan, petroleum industry, community development, approach, participatory, non-participatory, community development committees, joint operating companies

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Introduction

Community Development (CD) is a widely recognized concept not only in social sciences but also in the petroleum industry (Idemudia & Osayande, 2018). Etymologically, it originated from community initiatives aimed at enhancing progress and prosperity, and it is now commonly used to promote the development of host communities in oil-producing areas. This focus is crucial for uplifting these communities and fostering a sense of shared ownership over local natural resources.

While CD centers on the community, the definition of “community” has sparked scholarly debates, with contributions from thinkers like Watson (1997). CD is regarded as a complex and contested endeavor, often struggling to align with the lived experiences of the people it aims to benefit (Kapelus, 2002). Nonetheless, this complexity can be simplified, making CD a flexible concept. Communities are viewed as fluid entities, adaptable based on people's lived experiences (Kapelus, 2002). This study does not aim to provide a universally applicable theory of community but rather focuses on defining community in the context of natural resource extraction projects in specific locations. It embraces the idea that community involves negotiating interests while recognizing that it is not homogeneous (Otto, 1996; Odumosu-Ayanu, 2014).

Given the geographical impacts of natural resource extraction, this study emphasizes place-based notions of community (Nwapi, 2017), while also considering the effects of identity within diverse communities. Constructivist perspectives highlight how identity influences interests (Wendt, 1992). The identities of individuals within oil-producing communities—such as leaders, women, and youth—shape their interests, necessitating an understanding of the heterogeneous communities they engage with.

In this context, “community” encompasses both collectives and individuals within a societal framework. Similarly, “development” is a contested concept in social sciences and petroleum studies (Odumosu-Ayanu, 2019). Development is not solely determined at the domestic level; it holds international significance as well. Instruments like the World Commission on Environment and Development serve as critical references for the concept of development. Reports such as Weiland et al. (2021) and initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals, integrated into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United, 2015), reflect the global interest in this topic.

Development is frequently referenced by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which are actively involved in the design of various developmental projects. The World Bank emphasizes that development is not a one-size-fits-all solution, even though its prescriptions often appear similar (Cisse, 2013). Meanwhile, the IMF views development through the lens of effectively utilizing available credit facilities.

From critical views of development, scholars such as Esteva (1993) have espoused to Sen's (1999) “development as freedom” and Stiglitz's (2001) “transformation of society,” the concept of development has continued to witness significant analysis over the decades. Beyond these scholarly views, community views of development, including the views of individuals within heterogeneous communities, are critical to our understandings of development. This is essential, as the prevailing views and practices of development do not appear to fully possess the language to articulate a coherent view of development that accounts for the complete well-being of local communities” (Odumosu-Ayanu, 2019).

Community development is a conscious strategic activities carryout by the companies to uplift and empower community members to leap-frog from poverty, ignorance and diseases and take ownership of the projects and activities (Riak, 2024). Are community development activities approach well by the companies? How are the communities being developed? Do communities take ownership of projects that have been provided by the companies? What are the challenges associated with community development activities? What is the proposed solution to these

challenges? The study will answer the above questions. The study is arranged as follows: section one introduces and discusses the concept of community development (CD).

Section two discusses the approaches to CD. Section three discusses the activities of CD in petroleum industry of South Sudan. Section four appraises the challenges of CD in petroleum industry of South Sudan. Section five proposes a model as a solution for the challenges of CD in petroleum industry of South Sudan and section six concludes.

Approaches to Community Development (CD)

Various approaches are used in addressing the issues of community development and corporate social responsibility. The objective of such approaches is to ensure that community remained a lead and critical stakeholder in the development and progress of the world (Dinbabo, 2003). The approaches are discussed as follows:

Participatory Approach (Bottom-Up Approach)

This type of community development approach stresses working with local people and putting them in the centre of everything. This approach which is concerned with a process of peoples' development of their community is understood as inductive. It creates acceptability and "we feeling" in the sustainability of any project in the community (Kaiser, 2019). To achieve it, a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) must be carried out involving the community leaders and their subjects to list and rank their developmental problems and their proposed solutions (Chambers, 1994). This bottom-up approach can be categorized as "needs based" that the community agreed and approved. Then a Community Action Plan (CAP) must be developed, detailing the developmental problems, proposed solutions, actions and the sponsors for the agreed projects. The merit of participatory approach is that it ensures ownership and sustainability of the programmes and projects of the community and this is very pivotal in petroleum industry.

Non-Participatory Approach (Top-Down Approach)

This approach is a direct opposite of the participatory approach. It is where the developmental programmes and projects are planned and carried out without participatory rural appraisal. This is whereby developmental experts and sponsors do desktop review and decide to go to the community and commence a project. Sometimes, these experts (community leaders) will meet with few leaders who will direct a programme and a project for the community. This approach often fails because it has never involved extensive consultations from community leaders and their members on the problems facing the community and their solutions they proposed. This approach lacks grassroots participation, transparency and accountability and it is always a disaster in community projects' development and management (Brett, 2003). Those who always plan and carry out these top-down approach are christened as development tourists and not development actioners.

Community Development in Petroleum Industry of South Sudan

Community Development (CD) programmes and projects are planned and carried out by the various consortia extracting oil and gas of South Sudan. South Sudanese oilfields are divided into three blocks (licensed areas) namely; block 3 & 7 in Paloch, Meluth County of Upper Nile

state, block 1,2 & 4 of Unity state and block 5A in Tharjah, Upper Nile state. Block 3 & 7 is operated by Dar Petroleum Operating Company (DPOC), block 5A is operating by Sudd Petroleum Operating Company (SPOC) and block 1,2 & 4 is operated by Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC). The three consortia have share holdings from Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC), Nile Petroleum Corporation (NILEPET), SINOPEC, The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Tri-Ocean Energy. Each of these consortia has a CD department that supports the local community through corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the host communities of oil producing areas. It is important to discuss the projects each consortium has provided to the communities.

DPOC Community Development (CD) Projects

As mentioned above, DPOC operates block 3 & 7 in Paloch of Meluth County of Upper Nile State. There are many CD projects carried out in block 3 & 7. This block or licensed area has four field processing facilities (FPFs) such as Paloch, Adar, Gumri and Moleeta. These projects are discussed as below:

Water Projects

DPOC has constructed water projects for the communities in block 3 and 7. For example, water installations were established in Meluth, while water storage tanks were built in Paloch. In Adar, a well for clean drinking water was created, and in Moleeta, water is being supplied to the communities using tankers.

Health Projects

DPOC built Meluth Hospital and constructed Friendship Hospital in New Paloch. The company also purchased five ambulances, which were distributed across five FPFs. The HSE team initiated a monthly cleaning campaign in the field and established a central pharmaceutical store at the Office Base Camp (OBC) in Paloch to regulate the distribution of medical supplies. Additionally, various health and fitness activities are organized throughout the year according to the annual calendar.

Educational Projects

DPOC has undertaken significant educational projects, including Koum Secondary School and New Paloch Secondary School, both in New Paloch, as well as New Paloch Primary School and Athieng Primary School in Gumri. As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Schlumberger also built a primary school in Meluth.

Agricultural Projects

In Meluth, DPOC established an agricultural project to support farming. Its distributed 20 tractors for ploughing across the four FPFs, including 2 in Meluth County, 1 in Maban County (Jelhak Payam), and 1 in Renk County, along with diesel to assist the community in their farming efforts.

Roads Projects

DPOC began construction of the Meluth-Paloch road, but the project was later taken over by Africa Resources Corporation (ARC) and ultimately stalled. Additionally, DPOC renovated and opened the road from Meluth to Akoka (70 km).

SPOC Community Development Projects

As noted above, SPOC operates Block 5A in Tharjah, Unity state. Numerous community development projects have been carried out in Tharjach, Koch, and across Unity state. The Community Development (CD) department began as a security department before independence. These projects are outlined below:

Water Projects

Water filtration projects have been implemented in Mimir, Rubkona, Tharjach, and Koch to provide local communities with access to clean drinking water. There are two large water treatment plants: one in Rier, Koch County, and another in Bentiu.

Health Projects

Two hospitals have been constructed: one in Koch town and another in Mimir. Additionally, there are primary health care facilities in Rier, Koch County, and in Dandok, Guit County. Initially, these health services started with tent clinics before transitioning to permanent structures for the hospitals. Koch town also offers eye camp services and veterinary services as part of its mobile health initiatives.

Educational Projects

Both primary and secondary schools have been established. Two primary schools, Dandok Primary School in Guit County and Koch Primary School in Koch County, have been constructed. Additionally, Girls Secondary School in Bentiu and a primary school in Mimir have been built.

Roads and Bridges Projects

The following roads have been maintained: (1) Bentiu-Tharjach-Koch; (2) Tharjach-Leer; (3) Leer-Adok; (4) Tharjach-Adok; (5) Tharjach-Nyarup Port. The above roads are divided into 70km of Bentiu-Tharjah. 28km Tharjah-Kochroad and 50km Tharjah-Mimir-Adok road. Moreover, three bridges were constructed at Rubkona, Leer and Adok also by SPOC. As part of strengthening educational capacities, SPOC offered scholarships to bright minds students from five counties of Koch, Guit, Leer, Mayendit and Panyijiar. Finally, special needs scholarships have been offered to one blind student as well as one deaf student in Kenya.

GPOC Community Development Projects

As mentioned above, GPOC operates Blocks 1, 2, and 4 in Bentiu, Unity state, and in Parieng of the Ruweng Administrative Area (RAA). Numerous community development projects have been implemented in Unity state and RAA. These projects are outlined below:

Water Projects

In Unity, 7 water yards were drilled to provide safe clean drinking water to the communities in Unity state. These yards include Laloba I, Laloba II, Tong, Mankien, Thatwangyiela, Buaw and Kaljak. On the other hand, 10 hand pumps were donated to provide clean drinking water to communities in Unity state. They include Laloba hand pump, Manga hand pump, Dingyen hand pump, Biemruok hand pump, Kuerkuony hand pump, Kuerbone hand pump, Tharwangyiela hand pump, Mayom Town hand pump, Tumor hand pump I and Tumor hand pump II. Besides, 6 water yards were repaired and maintained as follows; Budang water yard,

Laloba water yard, Kilo 30 hand pump, Kaljak water yard, Buaw water yard and Tharwangyiela water yard.

In Ruweng Administrative Area (RAA), 19 water yards were drilled to provide safe clean drinking water to the communities of RAA as follows; Akot, Panrieng Town, Paluel, Panlor, Achidok, Panchuei, Pakeen, Akueiwut, Awit-Kong, Kurgung, Athony-Nyonglith, Bonki, Wunkur,-Kuok, Abiemnom Town, Nyiel, Awarpiny, Akoy Water, Miing and Nyarweng.

Health Projects

In Unity state, the following health projects were done for the communities: (1) Provision of one Ambulance to provide life saving support to the local communities in Bentiu Unity state; (2) Construction of one Specialized Hospital in Mankien-Mayom Unity state; (3) Provision of essential human medicines for communities in Unity state in Bentiu hospital Mayom PHCC and Laloba Clinic; (4) Provision of livestock vaccine for 1,800 animals in Mayom and Rubkotna, Unity state; (5) GPOC employed 24 medical cadres in the areas; 2 specialist doctors, 9 medical doctors, 8 nurses, 4 Lab Technicians and 1 Pharmacist in Unity state; (6) Construction of Laloba clinic in Unity state

The following health projects were done in Ruweng Administrative Area (RAA) for communities: (1) Provision of one Ambulance to provide life saving support to the local communities in RAA; (2) Construction of one specialized hospital in RAA; (3) Provision of livestock vaccine for 12,000 animals in RAA; (4) GPOC employed 25 medical cadres, 3 specialist doctors, 12 medical doctors, 8 nurses, 2 midwives, 2 theatre attendants and two lab technicians.

Educational Projects

The following educational projects were done in Unity state for the communities: (1) Modern Secondary School in Bentiu; (2) Scholarships for 50 students abroad; (3) Scholarships for over 1746 Unity state students in South Sudanese universities and higher institutions of learning; (4) Donation of schools benches and desks to Unity state government; (5) Donation of school text books and school shoes to pupils.

The following educational projects were done in Ruweng Administrative Area (RAA): (1) Modern Secondary in Panrieng; (2) Scholarships for 72 students abroad; (3) Scholarships for over 664 to RAA students in South Sudanese universities and higher institutions of learning; (4) Deployment of 8 secondary schools teachers to RAA; (5) Renovation of 3 schools in Unity state and RAA; (6) Deployment of science teachers; (7) Provision of learning materials to local schools.

Roads Projects

The following roads projects were done in Unity state for communities: Provision of Laloba Access roads and dykes. The following road project was done in Ruweng Administrative Area (RAA) for communities: Repairs and maintenance of Eltoor -Bonki Road.

Agricultural Projects

Provision of seeds to the local communities. Construction of access road to the farm schemes for ease of transportation.

Challenges of Community Development (CD) in Petroleum Industry of South Sudan

The key challenge in the administration of CD programmes, projects and activities is in the approach which had often led to unsustainability of the projects because of lack of ownership. Most of the CD departments don't carry out Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and thus don't execute the bottom-up approach. Besides, the Community Action Plans (CAPs) have never been clearly drafted and validated by all the stakeholders. The extensive consultations required in the community development is always bypassed and designed community projects are just presented to the leaders, particularly chiefs and county commissioners. These projects may not be the priorities of the communities. That is why most of the projects done be it schools, hospitals, water points, roads and agricultural activities to mention but a few are never sustainable because of lack of participation of the community members. Majority of socio-economic projects in Paloch, Unity, Tharjach and Ruweng have short longevity and thus majority have failed. Therefore, top-down approach has killed several community development programmes, projects and activities (Kaiser, 2019).

Propose Model Solution to the Challenges of CD in Petroleum Industry of South Sudan

The propose model solution to the challenges of CD in petroleum industry of South Sudan is to ensure that communities are in the centre in the decision makings on matters related to the petroleum industry. While various stakeholders such as consortia of Joint Operating Companies (JOCs), Government through Ministry of Petroleum (MOP) and National Oil Company (NOC), Nile Petroleum Corporation (NILEPET) have critical roles in the exploration, development, drilling, production and decommissioning in petroleum industry, the community should be assigned pivotal role to allow the members to benefit from hydrocarbon resources found in that particular community. Although the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, 2013 allocates 3% of the revenues to the community where the petroleum resources are found, these percentages don't reach to the members of the community as the political and military elites usurp them for their own selfish gains. However, the participation of the communities on matters of oil and gas in South Sudan is very weak as CD departments together with the consortia don't value the communities. Community Development Committees (CDCs) are often politicized, taking away the development from the hands of local members of the community and give it to the politicians. The result of this has been unsustainable and failed projects. The proposed model should put the community first as the most important stakeholder, follow by the Government represented by Ministry of Petroleum (MOP) and lastly Nile Petroleum Corporation (NILEPET) and the Joint Operating Companies (JOCs)-International Oil Companies (IOCs).



Figure 1. Proposed Model for Community Development in Petroleum Industry of South Sudan. Community should be the first in oil Exploration, Development, Production and Decommissioning. Community, Community, Community, Community

Source: Author

Conclusion

The study has defined community development (CD) and argued that it must be approached through participatory/bottom-up model. Bottom-up approach helps the host community to take ownership of the development in the area. Bottom-up approach uses Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to understand the problems of the community and the proposed solutions. This proposed solution should be chosen amongst ranked priorities to ensure “we feeling” during projects and activities implementation. The most success of any CD is the development of Community Action Plan (CAP) that details the problem, the proposed solution and the most acceptable intervention so far. While the challenges of the CD are on the approach, the study proposed a model whereby the community is the first and must be consulted widely before and during the execution of any programme, project and activity related to oil and gas industry. Although the petroleum industry is always argued to be capital intensive, it is proper to argue that the petroleum industry is also people intensive and must be led by the community. South Sudan should ensure that local communities are extensively consulted during oil exploration, development, drilling, production and decommissioning. Community Development Committees (CDCs) should be purely run by the local communities who directly elect their leaders and these leaders should ensure that CDCs are not politicized.

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