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Evaluating Stakeholder Engagement Models and Governance Mechanisms in Nigeria's Oil and Gas Sector: A Case Study of The Niger Delta Region

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Abstract

This study examines stakeholder engagement in environmental governance within Nigeria's oil and gas sector, focusing on three Niger Delta communities: Gbaramatu Kingdom (Delta State), Ogoni (Rivers State), and Biseni (Bayelsa State). It investigates the identification of key stakeholders, the processes through which they are engaged, and perceptions of decision-making power in environmental governance. Data were collected through a 10-item questionnaire administered to 70 oil-sector elites and supplemented with interactive sessions. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was used to analyze response patterns. Findings reveal statistically significant differences in perceptions of stakeholder roles, consultation practices, and stakeholder classification. Oil companies and host communities are widely perceived as primary stakeholders, with community consultations serving as the dominant engagement mechanism. Although stakeholders are reportedly involved in major decisions, perceptions of actual decision-making power remain divided. Tokenistic participation, mistrust, and communication gaps emerged as recurring concerns. The study questions the authenticity of existing engagement frameworks and highlights the need for more inclusive, transparent, and collaborative governance mechanisms. It recommends addressing power asymmetries, strengthening institutional frameworks, and promoting participatory models that move beyond procedural consultation toward substantive stakeholder influence.

Keywords: Stakeholders Engagement; Corporate Social Responsibility' Environmental Governance; Government agencies; Niger Delta Oil Sector

Introduction

A stakeholder is any individual, group, or institution with an interest in, or the ability to influence, organizational activities [1], and may be internal such as employees, management, and shareholders [2] or external, including communities, regulators, governments, and environmental advocates [3], with priorities ranging from profitability to environmental protection and social development [4]; consequently, maintaining legitimacy and a social license to operate requires consistent engagement, particularly in the oil and gas sector where stakeholders shape public perception, regulatory approval, and financial access [5], and where firms must understand stakeholder concerns and influence beyond simple identification [6]. Historically focused on production and profit, the industry has shifted toward sustainable practices due to environmental awareness and stricter regulation [7], as reflected in structured engagement standards such as API RP 1185 [8], alongside growing investments in cleaner

technologies, community development, and transparency [9] to address ESG expectations and build trust [10], thereby supporting long-term sustainability [6]. Industry stakeholders include employees [11], investors [12], regulators [13], local communities [14], suppliers, NGOs, customers [15], competitors [16], media [17], indigenous peoples [18], trade unions, academics [19], and the general public, whose collective interactions shape sustainability outcomes [20]. While influence varies among these groups, effective engagement with key stakeholders is critical and is reinforced by international frameworks such as the GRI [21], ISO 26000 [22], and the Principles of Authentic Engagement, with empirical evidence from long-term regional planning studies [22]. Within CSR, partnerships among public, private, and civil actors require clear roles, shared risks and benefits, genuine participation, and mutual commitment [23], ensuring that stakeholder dialogue meaningfully shapes decisions, enhances accountability, and ultimately enables organizations to create long-term value while contributing to sustainable development [23].

To this extent, this research paper seek to answer the question stated below:

- Who are the key stakeholders involved in environmental governance within Nigeria's oil and gas sector, and how are they identified, classified, and positioned in relation to decision-making power?
- What are the prevailing models and mechanisms of stakeholder engagement in the oil and gas sector, and to what extent do these reflect genuine participation as opposed to tokenistic or performative involvement?

Materials and Methods

Study Area

Three communities from the Niger Delta region were selected for in-depth study, one from each of the three key oil-producing states:

- Gbaramatu Kingdom, Delta State: A Chevron-host community marked by conflict history, deep environmental degradation, and recurring engagement tensions.
- Ogoni Communities, Rivers State: Shell legacy sites involved in decades of ecological struggles, UNEP environmental auditing, and delayed cleanup.
- Biseni Area, Bayelsa State: A cluster of communities exposed to oil spill incidents linked to multiple operators including Agip and Shell, with active environmental justice campaigns.

These communities were chosen based on specific criteria including geographic diversity within the Niger Delta, historical experience with oil extraction, direct exposure to stakeholder engagement mechanisms (such as Host Community Development Trusts), presence of environmental conflict or activism, and ongoing interaction with regulatory agencies and oil firms. This configuration enabled both comparative and context-sensitive analysis of how stakeholder engagement is practiced and perceived. The coordinate of the study area as shown in Figure 1 includes: Gbaramatu Coordinates: 5°35′59″N and 5°27′17″E. Biseni community: 5°14′31.8″N and 6°32′30.7″E, Ogoni Community : 4°37′N 7°16′Eand 4.617°N 7.267°E.

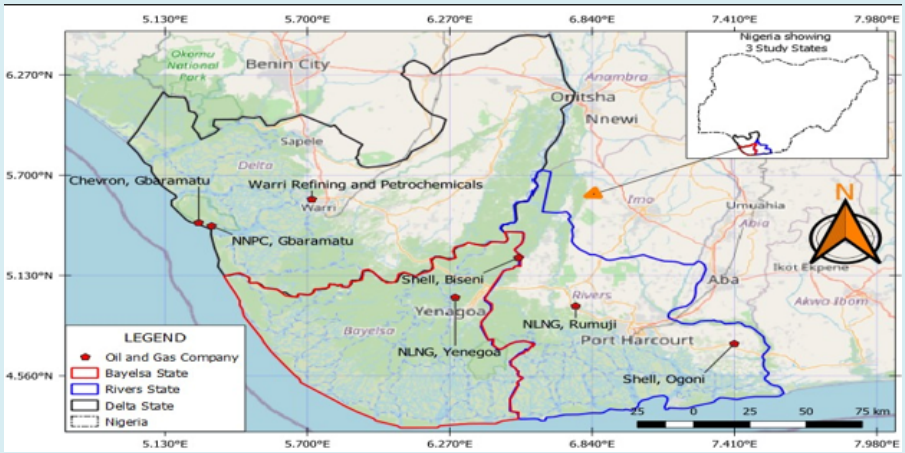


Figure 1: Map of study Area.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a combination of a 30 item Questionnaire, and interactive sessions.

A 10 item Questionnaire of multiple options was designed and given to 70 respondents who are elites in the Oil sector across the study area. The questions were structured with reference to the research questions used for the study. The

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responses were collated and used for the study:

- Sampling Techniques**:** The Questionnaire were selectively given to elites made of Oil company representatives, Academic Scholars in Universities and Community statesmen across the three states mapped out for the study. A total of 70 respondents attended to the questionnaire as only few of them were able to extend their time to respond to us. The issue discussed in the interactive sessions were already covered in the questionnaire items.
- Statistical Analysis**:** The Chi square goodness of fit was used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussions

Key Stakeholders Involved in Environmental Governance within Nigeria's Oil and Gas Sector

From Table 1, a Chi-square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit test was employed to examine whether respondents' perceptions of key stakeholders in environmental governance in Nigeria's oil and gas sector were equally distributed across response categories. Given that the data were categorical and no prior expected proportions were specified, an equal distribution (17.5 per category) was assumed. The analysis revealed statistically significant differences in most of the survey items. For Question 1, there was a significant difference in perceived primary stakeholders, $\chi^2(3) = 12.46$, $p < .05$, with oil companies and local communities receiving notably higher responses than other categories. Question 2 also showed a highly significant result, $\chi^2(3) = 29.29$, $p < .001$, indicating that community consultations are overwhelmingly perceived as the principal method of stakeholder identification. Similarly, Question 3 produced a highly significant outcome, $\chi^2(3) = 20.71$, $p < .001$, demonstrating that respondents largely believe stakeholders are classified using multiple criteria ("all of the above"). In contrast, Question 4 did not show a statistically significant difference, $\chi^2(3) = 6.43$, $p > .05$, suggesting no clear consensus regarding which group holds the most decision-making power. Finally, Question 5 yielded a highly significant result, $\chi^2(3) = 31.43$, $p < .001$, indicating that stakeholders are generally perceived to be frequently involved in key decisions, with no respondents selecting "never." overall, the findings confirm that stakeholder perceptions are largely non-random and significantly patterned, with strong agreement on the central role of oil companies and communities, the importance of community consultations, the use of multi-criteria classification, and the frequent involvement of stakeholders in governance processes, although perceptions of decision-making power remain comparatively divided.

Section	Item	Choices	Responses (70)
Key Stakeholders in Environmental Governance	1. Who do you think are the primary stakeholders in Nigeria's oil and gas sector?	A) Government agencies	12
		B) Oil companies	25
		C) Local communities	25
		D) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	8
	2. How do you believe stakeholders are primarily identified in environmental governance?	A) Through formal assessments	5
		B) Community consultations	35
		C) Government directives	20
		D) Media representation	10
	3. In your view, how are stakeholders classified in decision-making processes?	A) Based on influence	5
		B) Based on interest	20
		C) Based on expertise	15
		D) All of the above	30
	4. Who holds the most decision-making power in the environmental governance of the oil and gas sector?	A) Government officials	15
		B) Oil company executives	25
		C) Community leaders	20
		D) External consultants	10
	5.How frequently do you believe stakeholders are involved in key decisions?	A) Always	30
		B) Often	25
		C) Rarely	15
		D) Never	0

Table 1: Key Stakeholders in Environmental Governance.

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From the Table 2, Tokenistic engagement was carried out by all group of stakeholders as well as Mistrust and Communication breakdown but Oil Companies did not engaged in Asymmetry of power and knowledge. All group of stakeholders were represented for inclusive reform but the Oil outweigh the rest in terms of policy transparency.

On the demographic characteristics, there were 6 government agencies (4 Males and 2 Females) with 12 years experience that participated as stakeholders. 6 Oil Company representative (5 Males and 1 female) with 10 years experience participated as stakeholders. 6 Local communities representative (3 Males and 3 females) with 15 years experience in the same field. 6 NGOs/Civil Society members (2 Males and 4 Females) with 9 years experience in the stakeholders participation as shown in Table 3. The gender ratio of participation is represented in Figure 2.

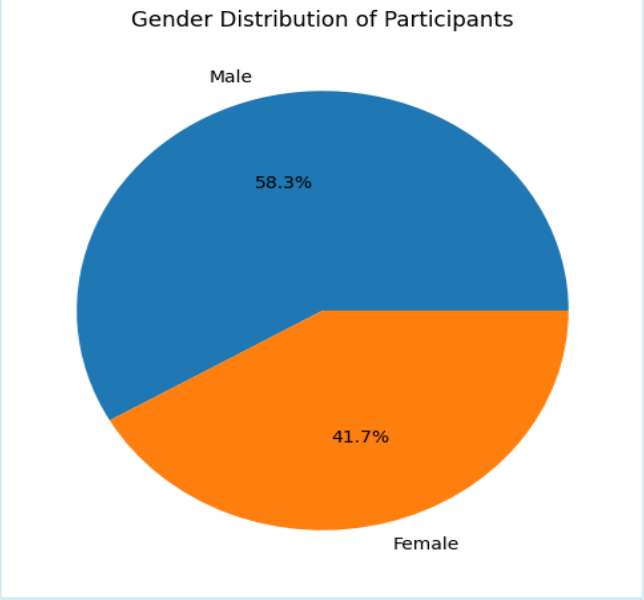


Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Participants.

	Theme	Government	Oil Companies	Communities	NGOs
0	Tokenistic Engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓
1	Mistrust & Communication Breakdown	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Asymmetry of Power & Knowledge	✓		✓	✓
3	Desire for Inclusive Reform	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Lack of Policy Transparency	✓		✓	✓

Table 2: Stakeholders Engagement Across Organizations.

	Stakeholder Group	Number of Participants	Gender (M/F)	Avg Years of Experience
0	Government Agencies	6	4M / 2F	12 Years
1	Oil Companies	6	5M / 1F	10 Years
2	Local Communities	6	3M / 3F	15 Years
3	NGOs / Civil Society	6	2M / 4F	9 Years

Table 3: Occupational Demography of Stakeholders.

On Cross tabulation of themes by stakeholders as shown in Figure 3, the NGO fall within 0.0 - 0.2 just above transparency deficit. The Local Community is at 0.0 just below transparency deficit. The Government is at 0.0 below transparency deficit and desire for reform and 0.6 matched with power assymetry. The Oil Companies is at 0.2 just below

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the transparency deficit and 0.8 matched with mistrust/weak institutions. Since 0 is attributed 'Not Mentioned', it implies that the Local Community is not mentioned. Since 1 is attributed 'Mentioned'. All stakeholders group fall under theme 1 and all matched below Tokenstic Engagement.

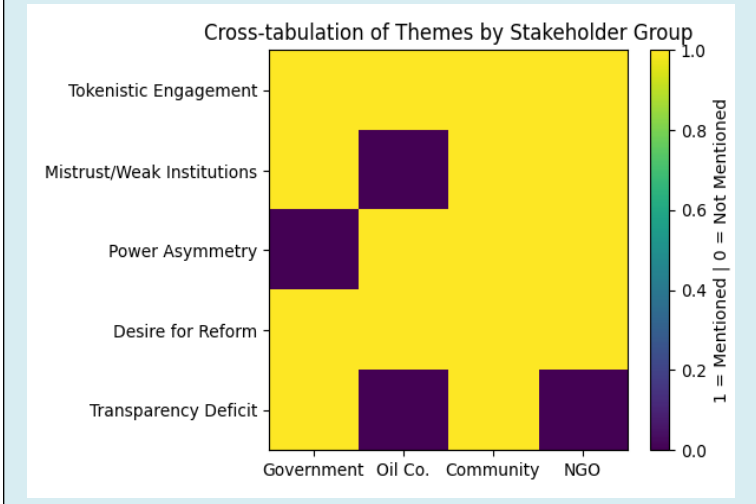


Figure 3: Cross Tabulation of Themes by Stakeholders Group.

On the frequency of themes across stakeholders group as represented in Figure 4, Tokenstic Engagement and Desire for reform rank highest at 4.0 followed by Mistrust/weak institution and Power assymetry at 3.0. The least of these themes is Transparency deficit ranking 2.0 on the chart.

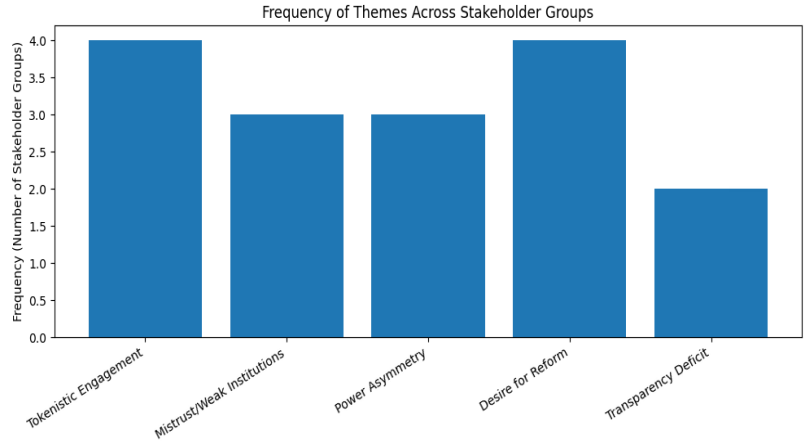


Figure 4: Frequency of Themes across Stakeholders Group.

Models and Mechanisms of Stakeholder Engagement in the Oil and Gas Sector

In Table 4, a Chi-Square (χ^2) Goodness-of-Fit test was conducted to determine whether respondents' answers were evenly distributed across the four response options for each question, using an expected frequency of 12.5 per category (df = 3, critical value = 7.815 at $\alpha = 0.05$). The results revealed statistically significant differences for Question one ($\chi^2 = 18.00$) and Question 3 ($\chi^2 = 8.24$), indicating that respondents significantly favored the collaborative model of stakeholder engagement and largely perceived engagement processes as performative in nature. However, Questions two ($\chi^2 = 5.36$), four ($\chi^2 = 4.00$), and five ($\chi^2 = 1.04$) were not statistically significant, suggesting that perceptions regarding effectiveness, modes of expressing concerns, and accessibility of engagement opportunities were relatively evenly distributed.

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Section	Item	Choices	Responses (50)
Models and Mechanisms of Stakeholder Engagement	1. Which model best represents stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's oil and gas sector?	A) Informative model	15
		B) Consultative model	15
		C) Collaborative model	20
		D) None of the above	0
	2. How effectively do you think current engagement models promote genuine participation?	A) Very effectively	16
		B) Somewhat effectively	18
		C) Not very effectively	7
		D) Not at all effectively	9
	3. To what extent do you believe that stakeholder engagement is performative in nature?	A) Very high extent	18
		B) Moderate extent	19
		C) Low extent	7
		D) No extent at all	6
	4. How do stakeholders typically express their concerns or feedback in engagement processes?	A) Public forums	20
		B) Written submissions	10
		C) Direct meetings	10
		D) Social media	10
	5.Which of the following best describes the accessibility of stakeholder engagement opportunities?	A) Highly accessible	14
		B) Somewhat accessible	15
		C) Rarely accessible	11
		D) Not accessible at all	10

Table 4: Models and Mechanisms of Stakeholder Engagement.

Discussion

Key Stakeholders Involved in Environmental Governance within Nigeria's Oil and Gas Sector

The findings presented in Table 1 demonstrate statistically significant and patterned perceptions of stakeholder dynamics in Nigeria's oil and gas environmental governance. The identification of oil companies and local communities as the primary stakeholders reflects what Adonteng-Kissi O, et al. [24] describe as a dual power structure in extractive governance, where corporate economic dominance intersects with grassroots legitimacy derived from communities' direct exposure to environmental degradation. This balance between economic authority and community agency is further emphasized by Darefaka JO, et al. [25], who argues that sustainable governance in resource-rich contexts depends on recalibrating corporate power through strengthened community participation. Thus, the significant result in Question 1 is not merely descriptive but consistent with broader empirical evidence highlighting the structural centrality of these two actors.

The highly significant reliance on community consultations as the principal mechanism for stakeholder identification (Question 2) aligns with participatory governance principles that advocate inclusive decision-making processes [26]. However, as Eikelenboom M, et al. [27] caution, consultation without systematic stakeholder mapping and formal assessment tools may inadvertently marginalize less visible yet important actors, thereby weakening governance legitimacy. This suggests that while engagement processes may be institutionalized, their methodological depth remains open to scrutiny.

Similarly, the significant finding that stakeholders are classified using multiple criteria (Question 3) reflects increasing awareness of governance complexity. Banso AA, et al. [28] highlight the importance of integrating influence, interest, and expertise in stakeholder categorization, recognizing the multidimensional nature of environmental governance. Nonetheless, Miles (2017) warns that overemphasis on interest alone can oversimplify stakeholder analysis and exclude technically critical or regulatory actors, pointing to potential blind spots within current classification practices.

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The absence of a statistically significant consensus regarding decision-making power (Question 4) underscores persistent governance tensions. Bouquet C, et al. [29] note that multinational corporations often retain strategic dominance even within participatory frameworks, while Head BW, et al. [30] advocates governance arrangements that better balance corporate authority with community influence. The relatively weak perception of government officials' power mirrors Kaitah A, et al. [31] concerns about regulatory inefficiency and institutional fragility in Nigeria's oil and gas sector, reinforcing the idea that formal structures do not always translate into effective oversight.

Although stakeholders are perceived to be frequently involved in decision-making as spelt out in Question 5, suggesting consistent engagement practices [32], this must be interpreted cautiously. Picone I, et al. [33] differentiate between procedural participation and substantive influence, arguing that frequent engagement does not automatically equate to meaningful impact. This concern is echoed in studies of the Niger Delta, where inclusive engagement across project identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation is essential for sustainability outcomes [6]. Furthermore, demographic findings showing improved gender balance and high levels of stakeholder experience [34] enhance the credibility of the engagement process, yet cross-tabulation results indicating tokenistic participation reveal persistent transparency deficits and power asymmetries. These patterns align with Uziogwe MU, et al. [4] longstanding critique that participation in the extractive sector often remains superficial due to weak accountability mechanisms.

Models and Mechanisms of Stakeholder Engagement in the Oil and Gas Sector

The statistically significant preference for the collaborative model of stakeholder engagement ($\chi^2 = 18.00$) aligns with participatory governance ideals emphasizing shared decision-making and inclusivity [35,36]. Although the results identifies a clear preference for collaboration, the broader literature suggests that this preference often coexists with consultative and informative approaches, reflecting an evolving but uneven application of engagement models across contexts [37]. This helps explain why, despite a significant leaning toward collaboration, perceptions of effectiveness (Question 2) were not statistically significant. As noted by Akemu O, et al. [38], Asiago BC, et al. [39], and Olsen T, et al. [40], stakeholders may recognize existing engagement structures yet remain skeptical about their capacity to deliver genuine influence. This duality moderate optimism coupled with doubt corresponds with Idemudia U, et al. [36] argument that participation mechanisms in extractive industries often struggle to translate procedural inclusion into substantive empowerment.

The significant perception that engagement is performative in nature ($\chi^2 = 8.24$) is strongly reinforced by the literature. Omotola HO, et al. [41] caution that when engagement processes prioritize optics over outcomes, stakeholder trust erodes, thereby undermining governance legitimacy. Oruwari HO, et al. [6] further stressed it strongly that meaningful engagement in the Niger Delta requires action-oriented participation throughout project cycles, not merely consultative rituals. Thus, the statistical evidence of perceived performativity directly reflects documented concerns about the gap between institutional intent and lived community experience.

The absence of significant differences regarding modes of expressing concerns as stated in Question 4 is in consonant with Frenier WW, et al. [42] who describe contemporary stakeholder environments as multi-channeled, incorporating public forums, written submissions, and digital platforms. However, the effectiveness of these channels ultimately depends on responsiveness from decision-makers, which may explain why no single communication mode overwhelmingly dominates perceptions.

Furthermore, the non-significant findings on accessibility as indicated in Question 5 suggest divided perceptions, a pattern supported by Mukiibi P, et al. [43], Alaye A, et al. [44], and Christine EK, et al. [45], who highlight persistent structural barriers related to geography, technology, and socio-economic inequality. Frynas JG, et al. [46], in the same vein, argues that participation in Nigeria's oil and gas sector is often constrained by unequal access and power imbalances. The statistical dispersion of responses therefore reflects real disparities in stakeholders' lived experiences of access [47,48].

Findings

The study found that oil companies and local communities are seen as the most influential stakeholders in Nigeria's oil and gas sector, reflecting a dual power structure shaped by corporate control and community proximity to environmental impacts. Government agencies and NGOs play lesser roles, indicating weak regulatory oversight. Although stakeholder engagement is reportedly frequent, it remains largely tokenistic, characterized by mistrust, limited transparency, and power asymmetry. The preferred engagement approach is the collaborative model, but most respondents view existing mechanisms as only moderately effective and often performative, meaning they serve appearances more than substance. Accessibility to engagement opportunities also remains uneven across stakeholder groups.

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Implications

These findings imply that environmental governance in Nigeria's oil and gas sector suffers from institutional weakness, unequal power relations, and low stakeholder trust, all of which undermine genuine participation and sustainable policy outcomes. Without reform, governance will continue to favor corporate interests, fueling community distrust and environmental degradation.

Recommendations

To address these issues, the study recommends:

- Strengthening institutional frameworks for stakeholder inclusion
- Enhancing transparency and accountability, and promoting genuine collaboration between companies, communities, and government.
- It also calls for capacity building, improved accessibility to engagement opportunities, and the establishment of independent evaluation mechanisms to monitor the quality and impact of stakeholder participation.

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