

Effectiveness of Mechanisms Towards Managing Mining-Related Communal Conflicts In Nigeria

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Abstract

Managing mining-related conflicts has featured different mechanisms in the literature. While there are arguments for government-led mechanisms, there are also advocates for the mining company as the main custodian of determining the strategies of controlling the conflicts with its host community. However, the application of these streams of mechanisms has not effectively controlled local conflicts associated with mining activity in Nigeria. As a contribution to the existing knowledge on conflict-management mechanisms, this study was aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of community-led mechanisms relative to other mechanisms in managing the miner-community conflicts. To do this, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 residents (leaders, indigenes and non-indigenes) from the mineral-rich Ibise-Komu community in Itesiwaju Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. Close-ended questionnaires were administered to collect perspectives of the participants on the different conflict-management mechanisms. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique. Findings revealed that the community-led approach is perceived by the respondents as the most significant conflict-management mechanism. In particular, the respondents argued that the community leaders should be aware of upcoming mining activity before the arrival of the miner. If this is observed by the government which issues the mining license, it becomes easy for the mining company to experience social acceptance when the mining operation commences and beyond.

Keywords: communal conflicts, mining activity, conflict management, ANOVA, Nigeria

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I. Introduction

The commercial exploration of mineral deposits is naturally characterized by conflicts because the miners are alien to the mineral-rich communities (Konte and Vincent, 2021). This assertion suggests that the external status of the mining companies exemplifies the possibility of parallel goals between the miners and the community – the former is motivated by business prospects while the latter champions people’s welfare. Thus, conflict brews as soon as the community considers the arrival of miners as existential threat to their hitherto peaceful coexistence (Bartrem et al., 2022). There is an extended array of evidence, indicating that the miners generally view their mining operation as a booster to the economic prosperity of the community (see for example Mensah and Okyere, 2014; Shashore, 2016; Abuya, 2018, Asnawi et al., 2020). However, conflict becomes imminent when this view is not shared by leaders and indigenes of the host community, which is often the case (Asnawi et al., 2020).

Given the likelihood of miners-community clashes, it behooves the concerned stakeholders to be aware of effective conflict-management mechanisms. Existing studies (such as Issifu et al., 2023; Bartrem et al., 2022; Konte and Vincent, 2021) have considered mechanisms led by the government in fostering peaceful relationship between the mining companies and their host communities. The rationale for such mechanisms remains that the government is often seen as the first-choice arbiter of truth and mediator in controlling the mining-related clashes. However, these mechanisms often lack social acceptance as the community sees the government as equally complicit as the miners in exploiting the mineral deposits beneath their land (Issifu et al., 2023). On the other hand, it has been argued by Abuya (2018), Asnawi et al. (2020) and Bezzola et al. (2022) that the company-led mechanisms can prove effective in setting the community on the trajectories of long-term peace with the miners. This later set of mechanisms seeks to make the mining company responsible for the environmental misconfiguration that its operation might have caused in the community. In another sense, when the mining company internalizes the external pollution and hazards they have caused the community, it would

recognize the use of corporate social responsibility as important driver of continuous extraction of mineral deposits from the land of its host community (Bezzola et al., 2022).

However, despite the popularity of both government-led and miner-led conflict-management mechanisms, the community-miner conflicts have not been significantly managed in Nigeria. Motivated by these unimpressive outcomes, the present study is poised to investigate the community-led mechanisms relative to existing mechanisms of conflict management between the miners and the community. That is, this study hinges towards a comprehensive analysis of different categories of peace-enhancing strategies between the miners and the community. To achieve this goal, a mining community was selected in Itesiwaju Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria – Ibise-Komu community. The indigenes, residents and leaders of this community were randomly recruited to give account of their perceptions of effectiveness of a group of conflict-management mechanisms which are led by the government, the mining company and the community. The remainder of this paper is structured into four sections. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on different methods of managing communal conflicts, Section 3 outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study, Section 4 presents and discusses the empirical findings while Section 5 summarizes the findings, including their policy implications.

II. A Review Of The Literature

Lamidi (2021) examined the effectiveness of peace-building mechanisms in achieving long-term peace and development of mineral-rich communities, with a specific focus on Southwestern Nigeria. Under the auspices of the multi-stage sampling, the author used a mixed-methods technique as quantitative and qualitative data were collected through the administration of questionnaire and semi-structured interview survey instruments. The collected data covered 18 local government areas, spanning the period of 2015–2017. The study revealed that quick intervention, cross-examination of disputants, negotiation and mediation of differences were evaluated to be the key peace building mechanisms adopted for the enhancement of peaceful co-existence in local areas within Southwestern Nigeria. A major derivative of these findings is that the polluting agent (such as the mining company) should be at the forefront of repairing the environmental damage which their productive activity may have caused.

Alade (2019) investigated mining-related conflicts in Ijesaland, Nigeria. Employing the frameworks of the human rights and stakeholder analysis, the study applied an exploratory research design to collate perceptions of the respondents through a mix of key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions in the selected mineral-rich communities. Secondary data from periodicals and archives supplemented the data used for the analysis. Findings showed that mining-related conflicts mainly arose from land degradation, water and air pollution, compensation issues, and depressing socio-economic impact of mining operations. The author further posited that although mining operation benefits the local economy as it expands the local productive capacity, it triggers inflation, environmental degradation, and erosion of cultural values, resulting in long-standing miners-community conflicts.

Akande et al. (2021) assessed the effectiveness of community-based peace-building mechanisms in conflict zones. The study utilized the participatory action research as a methodical approach to test peace theories, leveraging community knowledge for intervention. The community-based peace-building efforts showed a positive result as it emphasized the importance of contextual understanding of potential threats from divergent interests which might undermine the community development. To offer specific perspectives to their arguments, the authors drew case studies from conflict-prone communities in Nigeria and Zimbabwe, offering valuable insights for community-led mechanisms of fostering sustainable peace.

Okoi (2019) explored the government's disarmament policies in the Nigeria's oil region. Data were drawn from a sample of 396 ex-insurgents and non-insurgents, followed by in-depth interviews with 45 purposefully selected informants. The result showed that the demobilization phase of the disarmament policies was designed to transform the mindset of the ex-militants by providing them with nonviolent alternatives as a precondition for preventing conflict escalations. It follows that the implementation of the peace-building disarmament programme was instrumental in controlling the oil-related communal conflicts in the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Elisha (2022) assessed the relationship between natural resources, environmental security and community peace building in Nigeria, focusing on the Southwest geopolitical zone. The researcher used primary data collected over the period 2009-2015 across locations with pronounced incidents of land-based conflicts in Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo states in Southwestern Nigeria. Findings demonstrated a strong positive correlation between resource exploitation and prolonged communal conflicts. Exploitable resources, such as minerals, oil and gas, can transform political disputes into economic struggles, resulting in high conflict propensities in the community. In their concluding remarks, the author noted that competition for natural resources often contributes to violent conflicts, emphasizing the need for community-responsive mechanisms to address the natural challenges associated with resource extraction.

Krause (2019) identified the connection between gender equality and peace-building success, focusing on subnational gender relations in post-conflict communal settings in Nigeria. The study utilized qualitative fieldwork data which were sourced from 125 in-depth interviews over the period of 2010 to 2015. Findings revealed that gender equality and peace hypothesis have important implications for building local peace. These findings emphasized that considering gender dynamics is crucial for effective conflict prevention and peace-building mechanisms, particularly in areas with a long history of communal clashes such as Jos, Nigeria.

Issifu (2016) inquired the role of the mining sector in peace building, conflict prevention and community development in Ghana. The study used a qualitative research approach to collect categorized data from residents and indigenes of the mineral-present Ghanaian communities, spanning the period April–October 2015. The result showed that, large companies, including mining companies are legally required to provide social services in response to the negative impact of their mining operation on the environment and people who live around the mines. By implication, conflict becomes inevitable when the miners fail to respect such cozy agreements with their host communities. It might therefore be noteworthy that there are holistic and collaborative efforts from government agencies and civil society groups towards designing government-backed, comprehensive corporate social responsibility from the mining companies.

III. Methodology

This study surveys the perceptions of the locals of a mining community with regard to the effectiveness of various conflict-management mechanisms. This would project the strengths and weaknesses of the mechanisms, as may be preferred by the community members who are directly affected by the episodes of lingering conflicts between the mining company and the community. To collate these perceptions, a simple random sampling technique was implemented to recruit two hundred (200) indigenes and residents of Ibesi-Komu Community in Itesiwaju Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. In the recruitment process of the participants, preference was given to the community leaders. This was informed by the reasoning that the leaders are more likely to have lived for fairly a long time in the community, and are thus in the position to give historical background on the mining-related conflicts in their community. As a result, 50 community leaders participated in this study. This included the community heads, chiefs and leaders of landlord and landladies association.

While a closed-ended questionnaire was administered among all the participants, a semi-structured interview checklist was implemented among the community leaders. This data collection approach ensured that the responses analyzed in this study are not only descriptive, but are integrative of lived experiences of the participants on the various conflict-mitigation mechanisms they might have witnessed. The questionnaire responses were coded on 3-point scale as 2 for agree, 1 for disagree and 0 for undecided. Prior to the instrument administration, a pilot study was conducted among 20 residents of the sampled community. Responses of the residents on the pilot questionnaire affirmed that conflicts were indeed commonplace between mining companies and their host community. This confirmed that the instrument had high validity properties. Also, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 82.7%, indicating high reliability properties of the instrument – it could retrieve similar measures in repeated samples.

Thereafter, the instruments were administered among all the selected respondents who voluntarily participated in this study – they were asked to sign a consent form before the actual administration. The retrieval rate of the questionnaire was 100% because they were completely filled and returned by the respondents. However, only 42 community leaders participated in the interview sessions, meaning the retrieval rate was 84%. To make the interview participants remain 50, the unwilling leaders were replaced with willing residents. The collected data were analyzed using a mix of frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations and analysis of variance (ANOVA). While the first four methods of data analysis are descriptive (that is, they only explain the characteristics of the collected data), the last one is inferential as it helps in making informed decision on the degree of significant difference between the participants' responses on various mechanisms of conflict management. The ANOVA results were interpreted at 5% and 10% levels of significance.

IV. Results and Discussion

The participants' perceptions on the various peace-enhancing mechanisms are presented in Table 1. The government-led mechanisms received limited acceptance from the respondents. While 70% of them did not give consent to government disbarment of communal conflicts, 60% urged the government to create community-wide sensitization on the dangers of mining conflicts. And in case the conflict occurs, 46% asked the government to play the mediation role. Alternatively, 52% believed the government should involve the civil society groups in managing the mining conflicts. To project their core interest, 86% of the respondents claimed that the government should involve the community before the operating licenses are released to the mining companies. To further support this claim, almost all the respondents (97%) would like that the community to authorize the mining companies before the commencement of their operations. This suggests that the existing

mining companies have lacked social acceptance because the community members feel that the companies are *imposed* on them by the government. This finding is a pointer to the fundamental cause of persistent miner-community conflict. As argued by up to 68% of the respondents, if the community is carried along of the upcoming mining activities, the land use conflict can be eliminated because the community would have led the mining companies to the socially-acceptable location of operation.

In another vein, 85% of the respondents long for sharing the mining output. This arrangement is similar to the 13% derivation fund that is earmarked for the oil communities in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. In this case, the government declaration of a percent share in mining output for the host communities might prove effective in managing mining conflicts. While 80% of the participants want the compensation plans designed by the community, 77% long to see the community leaders receive the compensation on behalf of the victims.

Table 1: Analysis of responses on the conflict-management mechanisms

S/N	Item on the questionnaire	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Mean response
	Government-led mechanisms	52.8	35.4	11.8	0.71
1.	Government implements the disbarment policies	20	70	10	0.55
2.	Government creates sensitization about the dangers of communal conflicts	60	25	15	0.73
3.	Government mediates between the community and mining company	46	34	20	0.63
4.	Government involves the community in giving mining licenses	86	10	4	0.91
5.	Government involves the civil society groups in resolving mining conflicts	52	38	10	0.71
	Community-led mechanisms	81.4	12.8	5.8	0.88
6.	Community authorizes the commencement of mining operation	97	3	0	0.99
7.	Community specifies the land use for the mining company	68	20	12	0.78
8.	Community shares a part of the mining output	85	10	5	0.93
9.	Community designs the compensation plans	80	16	4	0.88
10.	Community receives the compensation on behalf of the victims	77	15	8	0.85
	Company-led mechanisms	33.7	52.7	13.6	0.60
11.	Mining company directly compensates victims of mining hazards	32	50	18	0.57
12.	Mining company increases its corporate social responsibility	38	46	16	0.61
13.	Mining company implements sustainability practices	28	60	12	0.58
14.	Mining company repairs the roads damaged by their trucks	32	57.5	10.5	0.61
15.	Mining company recruits employees from the community	38.5	50	11.5	0.64

This demonstrates high level of trust that the respondents have in their leaders and each other. However, the respondents were not particularly receptive of the company-led mechanisms. For example, while only 32% prefer that the mining company directly compensates the victims of mining hazards, 38% would like to see improvement in the corporate social responsibility. The fact that there is general disagreement of the respondents regarding these worthwhile mechanisms portrayed the reasoning that they are reluctant to welcome the company-led mechanisms. This might be connected to the historical experiences they have had with the activities of the company. In addition to this, only 28% trust the mining company to implement sustainability practices. The level of pollution and environmental hazards being experienced in the community might have contributed to the mistrust for any sustainable efforts from the company. When the respondents were asked if they would not mind the mining company leading the efforts to repair their damaged roads, 32% mentioned that they would. Finally, only 40% of the respondents agreed that the company should recruit the employees from the indigenes and residents of the community. The background to this outcome was narrated by the community leaders during the interview sessions. In their transcribed responses, they revealed that their past efforts to get the locals employed by the mining companies have not been successful.

It therefore follows that, according to the respondents, the community-led conflict-management mechanisms are perceived as the most effective mechanisms towards managing the miner-community conflicts in the selected mining community. This is followed by government-led mechanisms and then company-led

mechanisms. In particular, on average, 80.4% of the respondents argued for community-led mechanisms, compared to 52.8% who favored government-led mechanisms and then 33.7% in support of company-led mechanisms. A key implication of this finding is that residents and leaders of the community have limited trust in the mining companies they are hosting. They indicated that there has not been impressive relationship between them, owing to the hazards and development-dragging activities of the companies. The residents also prefer their community leaders to government as the custodian of conflict management. However, the political economy of this perspective is outside the scope of the present study. Whether the community-led mechanisms would not be laced with corruption and leadership failure remains to be explored.

In an attempt to ascertain the degree of significance of the collected data from the participants, their responses were subjected to a further inferential technique (that is ANOVA). The ANOVA was used because it is commonly described by researchers as relevant to test for significant differences in opinions of groups of participants. The ANOVA results are presented in Table 2 where it is noted that the responses on the community-led mechanisms of conflict management have the highest degree of significance, followed by government-led mechanisms and then company-led mechanisms. Therefore, the ANOVA results are complementary to the descriptive results earlier discussed in Table 1. The emerging findings from this study are in support of the literature evidence put forward by Akande et al. (2021) and Elisha (2022). According to Akande et al. (2021), community-led mechanisms are the most effective in managing local conflicts. Naturally, such mechanisms have social flavor because they reflect the needs and preferences of the community. Also, Elisha (2022) had argued that the mining-induced conflicts are effectively controlled over the long term when the community residents and leaders accept the mechanisms whose design and implementation emanated from their opinions, deliberations and suggestions.

Table 2: Comparison of conflict-management mechanisms – ANOVA results

Form of conflict-management mechanisms	Respondents who agree (%)	Respondents who disagree (%)	Mean response	t-statistic	Remark
Government-led mechanisms	52.8	35.4	0.71	12.47*	Significant at 10%
Community-led mechanisms	80.4	14.3	0.88	33.88**	Significant at 5%
Company-led mechanisms	33.7	52.7	0.60	7.49*	Significant at 10%

V. Concluding summary

This study has established that mining-related communal conflicts are locally sourced and are thus best managed using locally-sourced conflict-management mechanisms. The rationale for this outcome remains that the community members and leaders are the core agents that understand the structure of conflicts they live with, and are thus in the best position to suggest the mechanisms of controlling the conflicts. In particular, it was gathered in this study that the mining-induced conflicts are considered by the community members as causing existential threats to the living conditions of the host community. These threats are indicated by the sudden appearance of the mining company on the community lands, having secured approval from the government. Without the initial cooperation of its host community, the mining company is predisposed to unhealthy acceptance from the leaders and youths of the community. In consequence, as soon as the mining operation commences, the mining company loses the community acceptance to guarantee their long-term survival. This culminates into frequent conflicts between the company and the community. Even when the mining company hopes to realign its goals with those of the community, it is met with rejection and mistrust from the aggrieved community. This makes the evolving conflicts to linger for a long time. Given these findings, it is recommended that the conflict-management agents (government, civil societies, non-governmental organizations, etc) should consider the community as the main party of priority towards resolving the untoward clashes between the mining company and its host community. The conflict management should begin by identifying the preferences and concerns of the community and align those concerns with those of the mining company. More specifically, the community should be allowed to determine the land use for mining purposes and design the compensation plans for victims of mining pollution and hazards. Amongst others, these mechanisms shall effectively manage the continuous communal conflicts which would be absent if there were no mining activities.

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