

The reform of environmental management in the niger-delta: a case study of royal ...

[Environment](#), [Environmental Study](#)



Abstract

The current proposal aims to set forth the considerations for undertaking a study which explores the reformation of environmental management concerns and the implementation thereof in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It aims to do so through a case study of Royal Dutch Shell (RDS) as one of the primary oil extraction companies in the region which has a long standing and complex history with regards to environmental management. It is the expected outcome of this study that an analysis of RDS will show a recent renewed interest in environmental management, largely as a concern over sustainability in the region has become of equal relative importance in the national and international communities.

Introduction

The Niger-Delta is a source of pride for the Nigerian government, because of the oil-wealth that this region has provided for the national economy. However, the lack of resources and desire for wealth by the state has resulted in heinous disregard for principles of good environmental management in the area (Ofehe, 2010). The terrain of the Niger Delta has been overrun with deliberate over-exploitation carried out in complete disregard of basic principles of sustainable environmental management. Since 1957, over 4000 oil wells have been drilled in the Niger Delta region which has exposed the surrounding environment to numerous toxic hazards because of poor planning and management (Livesey, 2001).

Royal Dutch Shell (RDS) has been operating in the Niger Delta region since 1958. The company is the focus of many national and international sources of resistance to their operations, because of perceived disregard for concerns over sustainability and environmental management in the region (Wiwavshell, 2013). Despite humanitarian and environmental objections to their operations, RDS remains one of the more significant oil companies whose presence in the region has resulted in significant revenue for the national government and in recent years, benefits for the surrounding communities (Holzer, 2007). The juncture between the social opposition to their operations and economic benefits thereof has been the beginning of reformation of environmental management principles implemented in the Niger Delta.

Problem Statement

With the contentious history of oil exploration companies in the Niger Delta region, operations that continue to disregard principles of environmental management are no longer a possibility with the increasing importance on corporate social responsibility in national and international law and practice, as well as increasing social pressure to conform to certain standards. As a result, environmental management practices are being reformed in operations in the area. With RDS being one of the most significant and influential companies in the region, this research aims to analyze the environmental management reformation that is taking place in the region as driven by RDS specifically with reference to the broader context of environmental management in the region.

Research Objectives

To explore and analyze the reformation of environmental management in the Niger Delta region through analysis of the implementation of environmental management techniques used by Royal Dutch Shell in their operations in the region.

In order to answer the research question, the following objectives are set:

To explore the historical implementation of environmental management principles and techniques in the Niger Delta (or lack thereof).

To examine the history of Royal Dutch Shell in relation thereto.

To analyze the recent emphasis on environmental management in the region in terms of the social, economic and legal context which necessitate these principles.

To critically analyze the reformation of environmental management in the region, with emphasis on the role of RDS in this reform.

To understand the future requirements for reform in the region based on the goals for sustainability which have become a focus of national and international awareness, with emphasis on the requirements for the Niger Delta specifically as an area of international priority.

To make reasoned and informed recommendations for the improvement of environmental management in the region from a perspective of RDS specifically and oil exploration in the Niger Delta generally.

Gap in Current Knowledge

Whilst there is ample literature available on the need for environmental management reform in the region, there is no case study undertaken on the major oil companies' role in doing so. The way that the exploration agreements are structured places an almost state-like responsibility on the oil companies and there is relative freedom in their operations due to the heavy reliance on oil-wealth by the state itself. Understanding the role that RDS plays in the environmental welfare of the region and the role which it plays in the reformation of environmental management is essential to attaining the goals of sustainability in the region.

Research Methodology

Research Philosophy

The research philosophy undertaken in the proposed dissertation is a qualitative research method which will use primary and secondary sources of information. These sources will consider the theoretical framework relevant to environmental management in oil and gas exploration generally in terms of the sources of these obligations – social, economic and legal. The particular operations of RDS are highly relevant thereto and this information will be gathered from the company directly.

Data Collection

Collection of data for the proposed research will be gathered from a number of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data collected will

include legislation, supplementary practice notes and any other persuasive sources in international practice which may be relevant. These will be gathered from online sources which publish the relevant information with regards to the respective subject disciplines. Data collection of secondary sources will be undertaken from a number of electronic sources, primarily from databases that consolidate the information relevant to the current topic. This will be drawn from sources such as Questia, Jstor, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. This will be used to supplement any other secondary resources that are available in libraries or published in scholarly literature.

Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis can be defined as the analysis of data or information that was either gathered by someone else or for some other purpose than the one currently being considered, or often a combination of the two (Cossen, 1997). If secondary research and data analysis is undertaken with care and diligence, it can provide a cost-effective way of gaining a broad understanding of research questions without having to undertake time consuming and often impractical methods of empirical data studies. Ethical Issues

As the study does empirical data collection from primary sources, there are no prevailing ethical considerations relevant to the proposed study.

Literature Review

The impact of environmentally irresponsible operations in the Niger Delta has had far reaching consequences beyond the direct impact on the environment itself. The United Nations (2006) has reported that irresponsible exploration in the region has led to a breakdown in local government structures leading to violent conflict as the operations have impacted the surrounding environment polluting local water sources and destroying environmental sources of income, such as forests and agricultural lands. This in turn has led to a singularity in the national economy as being dependent on oil exploration and a disparity between the state and the civilian population of the country. This disparity is based on a disregard for the wellbeing of the civilians in favour of oil-wealth (UNDP, 2006).

From this perspective, one can observe the far-reaching consequences of implementing principles of good environmental management. Not only are environmental management techniques important for long term environmental goals, such as those recognized by principles of international environmental law (e. g. the principle of common, but differentiated responsibility), but also essential for the establishment and maintenance of sustainable practices and the political stability in the region itself (Babatunde, 2010).

Conclusion

Upon historical analysis of oil exploration in the Niger Delta, it is glaringly apparent that there is a need for reformation of environmental management as a matter of high priority before the environment is degraded to such an

extent that restoration is no longer possible. As noted, this has far-reaching implications for the broader community and for political stability in the region. As an industry leader, Royal Dutch Shell is expected to take a lead role in the reformation of environmental management in the region and the proposed research aims to explore and analyze this proposition. It is expected that the research will show a renewed emphasis on environmental management in the company's operations in the last decade with increasing emphasis on meeting sustainability goals and corporate social responsibility objectives.

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