

Community-Driven Development: A New Approach to Social Development in the Niger Delta

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Summary

The Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) process was started in 2005 by Chevron Nigeria Limited (Chevron) as a significant departure from prior operating experience in the Niger Delta. Previously, the company's community relations effort primarily targeted "host communities" and involved relatively large, signature projects such as schools and hospital buildings. Serious conflict between "have" and "have-not" communities, and between communities and the company, had been escalating for years. The new approach, based on a community-driven development model, was intended to deliver equitable and sustainable social investments, build capacity in civil society, and promote peace and security. This paper will describe the model, as well as programs for training and capacity building, governance, planning, and field research.

Introduction

Chevron's model of community-driven development was based on earlier efforts by Great Britain's Department for International Development and the Ford Foundation. The GMOU effort represented the model's first application in the international oil sector, as well as in Nigeria on a large scale.

By 2007, 72 projects had been implemented in 50 communities. By 2011, 200 projects were completed. In 2012, approximately 200 more projects were commissioned. In total, more than 600,000 people in nearly 500 communities have benefited from new health and sanitation, education, economic development, capacity-building, housing, jetties, and transportation initiatives. The 3-year GMOUs have been renewed twice, and conflict around Chevron facilities has been considerably reduced. These results can be attributed to several factors: the community-driven development model, upfront investment in training and capacity building, transparent engagement with government at all levels, and long-term commitment to the process by all major stakeholders. The results also indicate that, in extreme poverty areas, social investment may have a more lasting, measurable, and direct impact on beneficiaries when funds are directed toward projects that enjoy a high level of community "ownership," rather than toward large-scale initiatives.

Community-driven development planning, coupled with transparent governance, can be used in other West African, Southeast Asian, and Latin American locations in which oil companies are considering social investments. It may be especially relevant in situations in which traditional development approaches have failed and company operations are negatively affected by local conflict.

Oil and Violence in the Niger Delta

Since 1956, oil and gas production in the Niger Delta has affected thousands of communities across 300 sq miles of riverine and

coastal territory (as well as the "deep offshore"), involving dozens of ethnic groups and subgroups. More than 30-million people are believed to live in the nine Delta states in which hydrocarbons are found. Many of them cluster along remote creeks and on patches of high ground in swamps that are crisscrossed by flowlines, pumping stations, storage tanks, and other oil facilities. They must do without clean water, electricity, jobs, education, and health care, whereas all these things are available to oil workers. According to a recent World Bank report, "The divisions between rich and poor are more obvious in the Delta, and declines in Human Development Index have been steeper for the Niger Delta states than the rest of the federation. As well, the capital-intensive nature of the oil industry means that levels of unemployment and underemployment are higher in the core states of the Niger Delta than in any other region in Nigeria. Furthermore, oil industry-related environmental degradation caused by oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation has undermined opportunities in fishing, agriculture, and related traditional occupations ..." (Iledare and Suberu 2010).

In the early 1990s, gangs of disaffected "youth" often stole oil or equipment and occupied petroleum facilities in their own neighborhoods. They demanded jobs, community projects, training and cash—usually framed as a part of a larger campaign for environmental and social justice. By 1997, they extended their reach to coastal barges and "near-offshore" platforms. Beginning in the early 2000s, events acquired a more ominous cast: "On Independence Day, 1 October 2004, President Obasanjo held talks with Alhaji Musahid Dokubo Asari, the leader of the so-called Niger Delta Volunteer Force, to persuade him to call off Operation Locust Feast, a militia offensive against oil firms. Asari and his associates demanded greater local control of the region's oil and gas resources Political activists and pro-democracy groups in the Niger Delta have pressed the same demands for many years. Asari and his cohorts differ, however, in that they are linked to organized crime and are armed with relatively sophisticated weapons Thus, behind the reformist rhetoric, the violence in the delta is becoming privatized, interlocking with corruption and electoral politics, including the deployment of militias by state governors to intimidate opponents." (Ibeanu and Luckham 2007).

By 2006, Asari's Volunteers were apparently subsumed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). According to *The Economist* (Risky Toughness 2008), MEND "portrays itself as a political organization that wants a greater share of Nigeria's oil revenues to go to the impoverished region that sits atop the oil. In fact, it is more of an umbrella organization for several armed groups, which it sometimes pays in cash or guns to launch attacks." Between January 2006 and March 2011, MEND claimed to carry out at least 35 attacks on oil installations, personnel, and other facilities including offshore platforms and remote swamp pipelines, even in Lagos and Abuja.

Community-Driven Development as a Conflict-Resolution Strategy

During this period, international oil companies were becoming increasingly frustrated by the violence, destruction, and chaos. More than 1,000 people were killed each year, reports of illegal bunkering to finance political campaigns were rampant, and more oil-company funds for community development did not seem to

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make a positive difference. Between 1997 and 2001, Chevron's operations were disrupted 74 times.

But violence against oil companies was not the only problem. Competition concerning land ownership, disputes involving local-government boundaries, compensation from land acquisition and community-development projects, and disagreement in allocating employment opportunities contributed to ethnic conflicts that often turned violent. A protracted inter-ethnic conflict from 2003 to 2005 caused Chevron to lose USD 500 million in assets, shut in production, and restricted the mobility of employees for more than a year. During this period, several villages in Chevron's operating area were destroyed. When the company decided to evacuate, it also airlifted many of the displaced villagers from communities near its Escravos terminal to the safer Warri area.

In 2004, Chevron senior management was convinced that the time was right to pivot away from traditional development strategies and focus instead on reducing conflict and strengthening civil society. A rigorous stakeholder analysis revealed that conflict and lack of sustainability in prior community-development initiatives were driven by ethnic rivalry and the absence of community ownership of the development process. Chevron's new approach, called the GMOU, includes elements of other promising community-driven development initiatives in the Niger Delta (Ristau and Knight 2008).

The GMOU provides a template for new relationships between the company and 496 local communities in the swamps and along the coast, and five state and numerous local governments. It places development squarely in the hands of representatives of ethnic groups that number some 850,000 people in Chevron's vast operating area, under the theory that funds, and the benefits they bring, will be more valued if they are managed by local people themselves. It brings government to the table as a partner, treats every ethnic group identically by signing virtually the same agreement, and rewards peace, not conflict, with additional funding. Thus, Chevron hoped to restrain "conflict entrepreneurs" who have benefited most from disorder. And it abandoned the notion of "host community," a source of endless friction, in favor of more inclusive social and cultural boundaries.

By late 2005, Chevron (with support from the New Nigeria Foundation) negotiated agreements with eight Regional Development Committees (RDCs) of acknowledged community leaders. (Note: The initial RDC members were recognized by Chevron, but members have since been democratically elected for 3-year terms.) The RDCs receive an annual allocation from Chevron on the basis of their population and the value of the company's assets or oil production within their "service territory." The company also persuaded state governments to pay a share of RDC activities from their "derivation funds" (13% of Nigeria's hydrocarbon revenues).

The model contains a series of checks and balances to ensure transparency and to guarantee strong financial oversight. Community leaders would be recruited to serve on various committees, including Project Review, Conflict Resolution, and Accounting. Each RDC would be autonomous and independent, but project funds would be released only upon approval by a Community Engagement Management Board, chaired by Chevron. Triggers for release of funds include a 3-year development plan containing high-priority projects, the identification of certified local contractors, and project budgets.

The GMOU model adopts key principles of community development as articulated by the World Bank (Strand et. al. 2003):

- Work through a community-based organization or representative local council of a community. The essential defining characteristic of a community-driven development project is that the beneficiaries or grantees of implementation are agents of the community.
- Community-based representatives are responsible for designing and planning projects in a participatory manner.
- Resource control is delegated to the community.
- The community is directly involved in the implementation of the project. Often, participation is in the form of labor, funds,

management of contractors, or operation and maintenance after completion.

- Community-based monitoring and evaluation, and grievance procedures, ensure accountability to all stakeholders.

Planning and Capacity Building: Keys to Governance

Such a dramatic departure from normal business, with a simultaneous launch of eight new organizations, required careful planning and external resources. Chevron invited highly qualified Nigerian experts, the Enterprise for Development International and the New Nigeria Foundation, to manage planning and capacity-building tasks. The team (which also included the Terra Group as external advisors) proceeded on two tracks: governance and development planning. The RDCs needed to organize themselves as not-for-profit organizations, similar to the US community foundation model. The RDCs also needed to gain legitimacy with their communities, learn basic principles of community development, and adopt basic operating procedures for financial management and governance.

Chevron staff and external accounting consultants created financial-management systems to ensure that community-development funds could be tracked. A chartered accountant was provided to the RDCs to help set up their books and manage their systems. Councils were required to register with the national government as nonprofit organizations so that they would be able to raise additional funds. The team also developed a detailed manual and training program for the RDCs, and led a 2-day management seminar for each RDC. One Chevron community-liaison staff person was assigned to each RDC to provide hands-on guidance and support.

Other local experts were engaged to organize and standardize the Project Review Committees, charged with executing the development plan for each RDC. The Project Review Committees include local community members, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and Chevron engineers, and received specialized training in bidding, contracting, monitoring, and evaluation procedures.

These were daunting, but manageable, tasks. After all, some RDC members were sophisticated business people in their own right and quickly adapted to the new operating environment. But new development strategies that would bring real change to desperately poor villagers were largely unknown in Nigeria, especially at the scale and on the schedule demanded by Chevron.

Sustainable-Livelihood Assessment Theory

The company faced several practical challenges in gaining community buy-in to the new development model. In the Niger Delta, self-driven community-level planning was unknown. Rural people have traditionally depended on social networks and often form cooperatives, but generally do not undertake initiatives that extend beyond the household level. Because a vast majority of households survive at the subsistence level, very few can see a way out of extreme poverty, other than leaving the village to seek work in the cities. Many communities near oil operations depend on private oil companies to provide for their basic needs, and also demand that the companies provide jobs for their unemployed youth. In most areas, autocratic local rule is the norm. Remote local villages are populated largely by the poorest of the poor: women and children, who expect nothing from the "big men" who lived in relative prosperity in the cities of Warri and Port Harcourt. Without strict financial controls, the potential for corruption and mismanagement of the GMOU program was overwhelming. And this was the biggest challenge of all: For the first time in 20 years, Chevron would not be responsible for the success or failure of every project. If something went wrong, the new RDCs would be held accountable.

To help the RDCs plan how to allocate their resources and to gain community buy-in, the Chevron team settled on the use of the sustainable-livelihood assessment (SLA or assessment) to

gather accurate baseline information on local conditions and to begin developing momentum for community ownership of projects.

The SLA was developed by the UK Department for International Development to support poverty eradication by making the enhancement of poor people's livelihoods a central goal of development efforts. In this context, a livelihood is defined as the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources), and activities required for households to obtain a means of living. A livelihood is *sustainable* when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural-resource base.

These assessments served a dual purpose. They provided baseline social and economic information for 3-year community-investment plans, which RDCs were required to prepare before receiving their annual budget from Chevron. Equally important, they helped local people, who were often separated by conflicting allegiances and interests, to reach consensus about local priorities and to begin to think about their responsibility for determining their own future. So in addition to specific project benefits, this approach is intended to strengthen governance, build social capital, and empower poor, marginalized populations. Such measures—not simply building more infrastructure—are essential for development.

The resulting community-development plans complement and support a number of initiatives on the international, national, state, and local fronts to address poverty in the Niger Delta. Each aligns with current development policy and best practice, and provides opportunities for the RDCs and their communities to work with multilateral, international, government, and NGO sources of support to enhance livelihood security, infrastructure improvement, and community empowerment.

Putting Theory Into Practice

Niger Delta-based NGOs would be essential to the assessment process. The work, which took field researchers deep into the swamps and to remote coastal villages on repeated visits, required individuals with credibility and language skills to gain access to the communities. Each of the 29 NGOs was prevetted, and each of the 36 people who went into the field graduated from a week-long training program in May 2006 on the essentials of community development, field-research tools, and report writing. These specialists then divided into 19 teams on the basis of their existing knowledge and working relationships, and coordinated data collection in major communities and/or clusters. (In larger RDC areas, seven or eight contiguous communities were often "clustered" into a single assessment.) Each team also trained and engaged community members as "cofacilitators" who participated in data collection, validation, and other steps. A total of more than 125 people participated in the assessment teams.

Pre-entry visits, including community sensitization, an NGO meeting with stakeholders, selection of local facilitators, and planning, were arranged after the May seminar to familiarize community members with the community-driven development-planning process. These meetings provided opportunities for community members to ask questions and articulate their own expectations.

Assessment field work was conducted without major problems between June and December 2006. The teams triangulated information from various sources, including secondary data, transect walks, community mapping, focus-group discussions, seasonal calendars, wealth ranking, problem analysis, and observations as field dynamics permitted.

During this process, the teams estimated that at least 850 community residents participated in focus-group discussions, interviews, community tours, and transect walks and town meetings to validate the research results. The discussions challenged communities to differentiate between "wants" and "needs" and to make hard decisions on projects that would spread benefits most equitably and have the highest chance of success. Team members reported that they were greeted respectfully and that the villagers

were remarkably open about sharing their concerns and aspirations.

After the field work was concluded, the teams wrote up their first drafts and took them back to the communities. Community members were encouraged to make comments and inputs to the document for validation and final revisions. And, in what may have been another milestone, women were actively included as assessment participants. (Although they are often the sole providers of household income, most Delta women remain marginalized and have little voice in local affairs.)

Eventually, 32 assessments were completed for 450 communities. A summary provides a disturbing but realistic glimpse of conditions in Chevron's operating area:

- Household sizes ranged from 12 to 17 people.
- Nearly 75% of households depended on fishing or casual labor, and many households faced seasonal food shortages or starvation. Even in good times, most people did not eat three meals a day.
- Polygamy was rising in remote areas because younger men usually left their villages to seek work elsewhere. Young women were often forced to marry older men who already had three, four, or five wives. Several researchers equated their situation with slavery.
- Children numbered more than 50% of the population in each village, but only a handful attended school.
- A vast majority of adults were illiterate and had never been to school.
- Although Chevron and Shell had been providing infrastructure for 20 years, most of it was missing or nonfunctional. Among 450 communities, only 27 schools were in full use, and only 19 electric generators could be found. Meanwhile, researchers counted 15 operating boreholes, wells, or pipes out of dozens that had been constructed. Only one health clinic operated among coastal communities; no health facilities existed in the swamps.

The NGOs were next charged with drafting 3-year community-development plans to address high-priority local needs. Various projects were suggested in community meetings, and subsequent focus groups (women, youth, elders, and others) assessed each one on the basis of a series of value drivers (**Table 1**). This process helped the community arrive at a consensus on initiatives that would be affordable, have the maximal impact on the largest number of people, and would be most likely to improve living conditions.

Chevron's team required that the community-development plans follow several basic principles to ensure sustainability and long-term benefits:

- Wherever possible, rehabilitate or complete existing infrastructure before investing in new construction.
- Engage government agencies, where appropriate, to provide their legally mandated services, including education, health care, and infrastructure.
- Involve community members as active participants in project planning and execution.
- Use every project as a capacity-building opportunity (skills acquisition through apprenticing local youth to contractors hired, for example, to build community projects and form community-based organizations).
- Reinforce community pride in ownership of development projects and outcomes.

The community-development planning process is illustrated in **Fig. 1**.

The assessments and plans were turned over to the RDCs in 2007 for implementation. In general, the RDCs emphasized water and sanitation as their first priority, followed by renovation of dilapidated schools and clinics, improved health and education, and strengthened local businesses. The emphasis on renovation was especially encouraging; in the past, communities simply insisted that the oil companies build new facilities, which quickly fell into disrepair. The RDCs instead hired local people to restore existing "assets" and then lobbied state and federal agencies to provide the requisite teachers, health workers, and materials.

TABLE 1—SAMPLE VALUE DRIVERS FOR SELECTING COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Location: _____
 Project: _____

	High	Medium	Low
<p>1. Impact High “value-added”: broad social and/or economic benefit (e.g., significantly increases household income, creates jobs, and enhances peace and stability). Spreads benefits equitably among beneficiaries. Strengthens peaceful and orderly society. Addresses youth unemployment/underemployment. Improves opportunities for women.</p> <p>2. Sustainability Encourages self-reliance and avoids dependency. Responds to existing or potential market (for economic projects). Strengthens capacity of individuals, community-based organizations, NGOs, or local government. Opens partnership opportunities with community-based organizations, NGOs, other donors, or government. Creates opportunity for government engagement and support.</p> <p>3. Project management High likelihood of success (from feasibility studies). Designed to build out from success. Optimizes and/or complements existing resources and capabilities. Beneficiaries are involved in program design and execution. Project planning and execution are transparent. Strengthens long-term positive relationships among stakeholders (e.g., state governments and Chevron).</p>			

Elaborate processes were developed to prevent graft and corruption. In each RDC area, the Project Review Committee is responsible for developing terms of reference for each project, putting it out to bid, qualifying contractors, and monitoring the

project. Local contractors are encouraged to bid for construction and infrastructure projects, but cannot bid for projects in their own RDC area if they serve on this Committee. Chevron’s leadership team developed a training program and guidance manual for

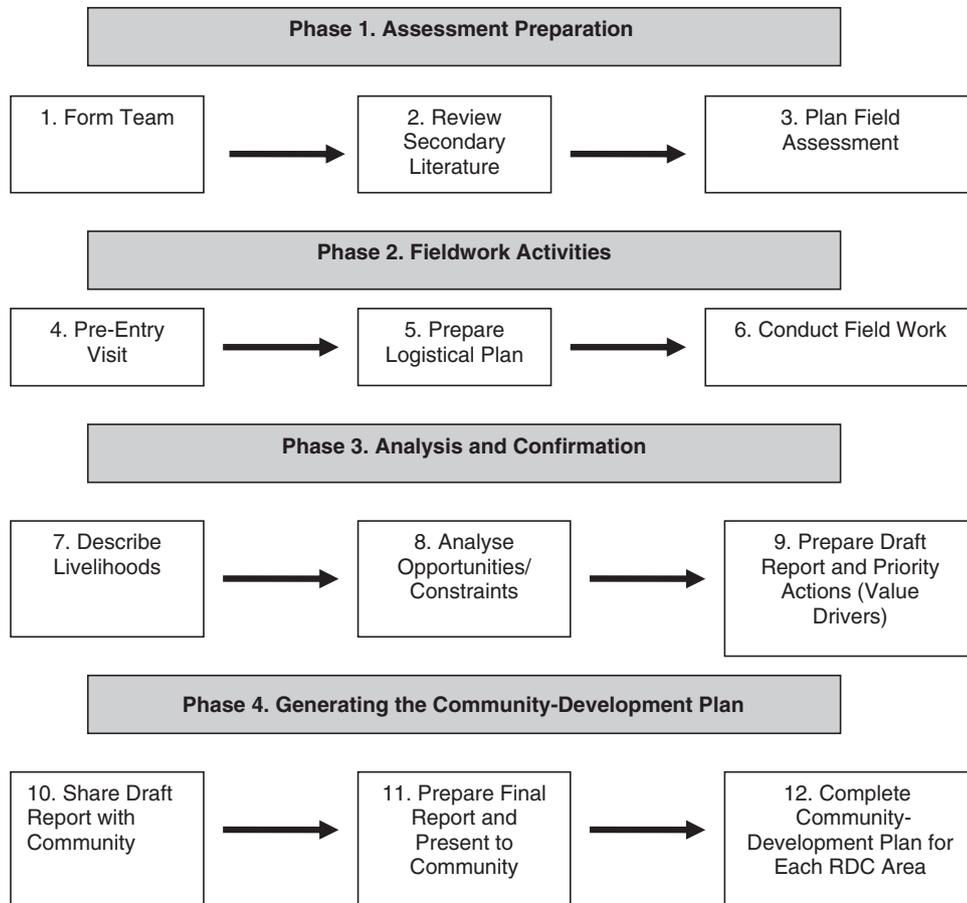


Fig. 1—Community-development planning process.

TABLE 2—GMOU PROJECTS IN EACH RDC AREA FROM 2007 TO 2012

Council	Power	Education	Health/ Sanitation	Transportation	Communication/ Economic Empowerment	Housing
Kula	6		8	4		4
Dodo		2	17		1	
Keffes	32	8	29	7	4	
Itsekiri			1	5	2	104
Egbema-Gbaramatu	2		21	20	8	10
Ilaje		2	5	40	2/16	3
Idama	9	5	8	4		
Jisike	9		30		3	

Power projects include generators, street lights, distribution system, diesel fuel, generator house, and transformer repair.

Education projects include secondary-school laboratory equipment, school-building construction, teachers' quarters, and classroom furniture.

Health and sanitation projects include drainage, health-center construction, drugs for the health center, hospital construction, morgue and mortuary construction, boreholes, toilets, and reverse-osmosis water systems.

Transportation projects include paved roads and foot bridges, boats, and bicycles.

Communication and economic empowerment projects include construction of markets, town halls, women's meeting halls, guest houses, and fish and poultry farms.

the Project Review Committees, which also had other responsibilities, including:

- Design annual work plans to execute the 3-year development plans.
- Ensure that all 3-year plans align with other government-planning documents, including the Niger Delta Development Commission Master Plan and state- and local-government plans.
- Ensure that projects are implemented in line with design and construction specifications and do not exceed budgeted costs.
- Review each RDC contracting process to confirm that projects and other activities will be executed by qualified local contractors, to the extent possible.
- Recommend disbursements when project milestones are met.
- Oversee the contracting process.
- Design and manage a project-monitoring and -evaluation system that must involve community residents.
- Work with communities to develop and agree to a multistakeholder agreement for each project, which commits community members to participate through providing resources such as labor, materials, land space, and/or funding.
- Assist the RDC in identifying other potential sources of support for development activities.

To ensure ongoing community ownership and commitment to the development process, the RDC must hold at least one town-hall meeting each year to review progress and discuss new initiatives. The meetings help foster transparency, and encourage communities to participate in locating and naming projects (if appropriate).

Data and Results

During the first 3 years of the program (2007 to 2010), Chevron provided more than USD 56.7 million to RDCs for nearly 500 community-level projects (Table 2). In 2012 alone, the RDCs commissioned approximately 200 more infrastructure and noninfrastructure projects worth more than USD 22.3 million.

Before the renegotiations of the GMOU agreements in 2008 and 2011, participatory stakeholder evaluations were performed by independent third-party experts to take relevant stakeholders' views into account [Research Triangle Institute (2008), Search for Common Ground and Consensus Building Institute]. Among the gaps identified in 2008, they found:

- Coordination with government was “minimal and inadequate.”
- Many [communities] still expect the handouts and benefits of the previous system, causing tensions.
- Funding levels are inadequate to address the extensive needs of communities.
- Projects are slow to develop.
- Women have been excluded from the process.

• Communication between RDCs and communities has been poor.

• Decision-making is often cumbersome.

Many of these issues will take time to resolve completely, but the regular renegotiation process has afforded participants the opportunities to try new approaches. Four specific examples include:

- All stakeholders generally agreed that funding required for transformative impacts at the community level could not come from Chevron alone. A Resource Mobilization and Advocacy Committee was formed to drive advocacy efforts and seek third-party funding as well as in-kind development contributions.
- A Communications Committee serves as a technical adviser on communications.
- A Gender Subcommittee was formed to improve the participation of women in the GMOU process.
- Evaluations indicate that the RDCs have, at times, emphasized infrastructure investments more than human-capacity investments. In the new GMOU agreements, efforts to improve livelihoods and create opportunities for economic development will be supported by a regional economic-growth opportunity study.

The program has apparently met many of its goals. Communities with no running water, electricity, transportation, or health care are now benefitting from an improved quality of life. New economic opportunities for men and women mean that household livelihoods can increase. More education programs will raise literacy levels and enhance economic opportunities for young boys and girls. As more stakeholders become invested in the success of the GMOUs, they have moved away from violence and conflict as a survival strategy toward greater inclusiveness and participatory democracy.

Violence throughout the region has dropped significantly. According to Chevron, community-induced disruptions to Chevron operations progressively reduced as the RDCs gained a better understanding of the peace-building processes built into the GMOU. The number of community-induced disruptions to Chevron operations went from 81 in 1998 to 11 in 2011 to 0 in 2012.

New agreements were negotiated in 2009, and the third round of GMOUs is under way as of the date of this paper. RDCs held leadership elections; some were re-elected, and some were replaced by their local communities, encouraging new leaders to emerge.

Conclusions

This case highlights essential lessons for international corporations operating in weak, conflict-prone communities around the world. After following a conventional “license to operate” approach, Chevron recognized that simply providing “fair and just” compensation to local landowners (including communities) would not address the underlying sources of conflict: poverty,

disempowerment, and discrimination. They eventually improvised a new alternative (Onuhoa 2011). In particular, the GMOUs overcome a weakness found in most corporate social-responsibility (CSR) initiatives: “a key constraint to CSR’s role in development is the business case, that is, the subservience of any CSR schemes to corporate objectives ... profit-maximizing motives are often incompatible with good development practice. Given that oil companies are not development agencies, they do not tend to prioritize overall development goals, and there are inherent limitations to how corporate social initiatives can address the concerns of local communities.” (Frynas 2009).

The GMOUs demonstrate that oil companies are capable of moving beyond a narrow view of the “business case.” Chevron’s GMOUs have been adopted by other companies and have spread throughout the Niger Delta. State governments, which heretofore have been alleged to be virtually inaccessible and unaccountable to local people, sit at the table with RDCs and nonprofit development groups. This process has provided an experience of meaningful participation, greater involvement of women and minorities, and relatively transparent decision making in marginalized and disempowered communities. It has strengthened civil society as a result, which ultimately supports the business case for development in conflict-prone communities.

Ultimately, the GMOU case supports the benefit of a long-term vision to address conflict, democratic deficits, and crushing poverty. It proves the value of investing in human capital through training and capacity building, and demonstrates that consistency and transparency on the part of an international oil company can build lasting partnerships.

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