

Community Relations Practices in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry: Reviewing Regulatory Frameworks, Stakeholder Engagement, and Compliance Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a narrative review of community relations practices in the oil and gas industry, with particular attention to the Nigerian context, where the extractive sector's operations intersect with high-expectation, resource-dependent host communities. Drawing on institutional reports, statutory instruments, and peer-reviewed literature, the review synthesises extant knowledge on community needs assessment, stakeholder identification and mapping, community engagement, conflict prevention and resolution, grievance redress, corporate social responsibility (CSR) project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The review further examines the regulatory and legal architecture governing community relations in Nigeria, principal community-related risks and mitigation strategies, capacity building and local content development, and the ethical considerations that underpin responsible stakeholder engagement. The review is conceptual and qualitative in nature; it does not generate or analyse primary empirical data but instead synthesises and critically appraises existing scholarly and institutional sources to construct an integrated understanding of standard operating frameworks for community relations. Findings indicate that although a substantial body of guidance exists on individual components of community relations, there remains a paucity of integrated, empirically validated frameworks that harmonise these components into a single, auditable standard operating procedure applicable across diverse operating contexts. The review concludes by identifying gaps in the literature and proposing an agenda for future empirical inquiry, while offering practical implications for oil and gas operators, regulators, and community development practitioners.

Keywords: Community relations, corporate social responsibility, stakeholder engagement, social license to operate, grievance redress mechanism, oil and gas industry, Niger Delta

INTRODUCTION

The oil and gas industry occupies a position of singular importance in the economic architecture of resource-rich nations, and nowhere is this more evident than in Nigeria, where petroleum revenues have historically underwritten a substantial share of national income and foreign exchange earnings. Beyond its fiscal contribution, the industry is widely expected to function as an agent of socio-economic transformation within the communities that host its operations. This expectation is rooted in the visible environmental footprint of exploration and production activities, the disruption of traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming, and a pervasive local perception that the wealth extracted from communal land and waters ought to translate into tangible and equitable development (Aghalino & Eyinla, 2023; Omoye, 2025).

In the Niger Delta and comparable oil-producing regions elsewhere, the relationship between operating companies and host communities has historically been characterised by an uneasy mixture of dependency, expectation, mistrust, and episodic conflict. Unfulfilled corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments, environmental degradation, exclusionary development planning, and inconsistent communication have repeatedly been identified in the literature as proximate causes of community grievance and resistance (Nnadozie & Obasi, 2022; Eruvwe et al., 2024). In several documented instances, unresolved grievances have escalated

into community protests, pipeline vandalism, and prolonged operational shutdowns, with attendant consequences for production continuity, investor confidence, and national revenue.

A recurring theme across the literature is that although many operating companies have invested considerable resources in CSR projects, employment schemes, and periodic stakeholder consultations, these efforts are frequently fragmented, reactive, and poorly harmonised across departments and operating sites. The absence of a unified, institutionally embedded framework for managing community relations has been identified as a structural weakness that undermines the consistency, predictability, and defensibility of community engagement practice (Nwankwo & Ifejika Speranza, 2020; Akpomiemie et al., 2026). This weakness has, in turn, generated growing interest among scholars, regulators, and industry practitioners in the development and codification of standard operating procedures (SOPs) that harmonise community engagement approaches across the project lifecycle.

This paper responds to that interest by undertaking a focused review of the literature and institutional guidance on community relations practice in the oil and gas sector. Unlike an empirical study, which would typically involve the collection and statistical or thematic analysis of primary data from a defined sample of respondents, this review is conceptual and library-based in orientation. It draws together, compares, and critically synthesises secondary sources, scholarly articles, institutional reports, statutory instruments, and industry guidance documents, in order to construct an integrated picture of what constitutes good practice in community relations, and to identify the areas in which existing knowledge remains incomplete or contested.

The specific objectives of this review are to: (i) clarify the core concepts that underpin community relations practice in extractive industries; (ii) examine the theoretical perspectives that have been advanced to explain company-community interaction; (iii) synthesise the literature on the core functional components of community relations, including needs assessment, stakeholder mapping, engagement, conflict prevention, grievance redress, CSR implementation, and monitoring and evaluation; (iv) review the regulatory and legal frameworks that govern community relations activity in Nigeria; (v) examine the principal risks associated with community relations and the mitigation strategies proposed in the literature; (vi) review the literature on capacity building and local content development as pillars of sustainable community relations; and (vii) examine the ethical considerations that should guide community engagement, before identifying gaps in current knowledge and proposing directions for future research.

The review is significant on several counts. For scholars, it consolidates a body of literature that is presently dispersed across disciplinary boundaries, management, development studies, law, and environmental policy, into a single integrated account. For practitioners and community relations managers, it offers a structured reference point against which existing company practice can be benchmarked. For policymakers and regulators, it highlights areas in which statutory guidance may require strengthening or clarification. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 outlines the review methodology; Section 3 clarifies core concepts; Section 4 discusses the theoretical framework; Section 5 synthesises the literature on functional components of community relations; Section 6 examines the regulatory and legal framework; Section 7 discusses risk management; Section 8 reviews capacity building and local content development; Section 9 discusses ethical considerations; Section 10 presents a synthesis of the reviewed literature; Section 11 identifies gaps and future research directions; Section 12 discusses implications for practice and policy; and Section 13 concludes the paper.

METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

This paper adopts a narrative, integrative review methodology rather than a systematic or empirical research design, in keeping with its objective of synthesising and critically appraising existing knowledge rather than generating new primary data. The narrative review approach was considered appropriate because the subject matter—community relations in the oil and gas sector—is inherently multidisciplinary, spanning management, development economics, environmental law, and conflict studies, and is therefore better served by a synthesising review that can draw connections across disciplinary boundaries than by the narrower inclusion criteria typical of a systematic review or meta-analysis.

Sources consulted for this review include peer-reviewed journal articles addressing corporate social responsibility, stakeholder engagement, and community development in extractive industries; institutional and industry guidance documents, including reports and handbooks published by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI); and relevant Nigerian statutory instruments, including the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content Development Act, 2010, and the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, Cap E12, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. In addition, an internally developed standard operating procedure document for community relations activities, prepared for application within an oil and gas operating context, was reviewed as an illustrative case of how the reviewed literature and regulatory requirements are being operationalised in practice.

The review was organised thematically rather than chronologically, with literature and guidance documents grouped into functional domains corresponding to the core components of community relations practice identified in the introduction: needs assessment, stakeholder mapping, engagement, conflict prevention and resolution, grievance redress, CSR implementation, monitoring and evaluation, regulatory compliance, risk management, capacity building, and ethical considerations. Within each thematic domain, sources were compared and contrasted to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and gaps. It is acknowledged that, as a narrative review relying exclusively on secondary sources, this paper does not permit statistical generalisation and is subject to the limitations inherent in any review that does not follow a fully systematic protocol for source identification and appraisal; nonetheless, the approach is well suited to the paper's conceptual and synthesising purpose.

Conceptual Clarification

Community Relations

Community relations refers to the deliberate and structured set of activities through which a company manages its relationship with the individuals, groups, and institutions resident in, or affected by, its area of operation. It is distinguished from the broader function of public relations by its explicit focus on geographically defined host communities rather than on diffuse publics or media audiences, and by its emphasis on sustained, face-to-face engagement rather than mass communication alone (Eruvwe et al., 2024; Omoye et al., 2026). In the extractive industries context, community relations encompasses needs assessment, stakeholder engagement, grievance handling, and the coordination of community development investment, and is typically discharged through dedicated community affairs or external affairs departments supported by field-based community liaison personnel.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is commonly understood as the voluntary integration of social and environmental considerations into a company's business operations and its interactions with stakeholders, extending beyond the company's strictly legal and economic obligations. Carroll's (1991) widely cited pyramid conceptualises CSR as comprising economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, with the latter two categories most directly implicated in community relations practice (Eruvwe et al., 2024; Omoye et al., 2026). Within the oil and gas literature, CSR is frequently discussed as the principal vehicle through which companies seek to translate their social license to operate into visible community benefit, typically through infrastructure provision, education and health interventions, and livelihood support programmes (Nnadozie & Obasi, 2022).

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is defined by the International Finance Corporation (2022) as an ongoing process encompassing information disclosure, consultation, and participatory decision-making, through which a company builds and maintains constructive relationships with individuals and groups who affect, or are affected by, its operations. In the community relations literature, stakeholder engagement is treated both as an ethical

obligation grounded in principles of participation and self-determination, and as an instrumental risk-management practice that reduces the likelihood of conflict and operational disruption.

Social License to Operate

The concept of a social license to operate captures the ongoing acceptance or approval of a company's operations by local communities and other stakeholders, distinct from the formal legal licenses issued by government authorities. The Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI, 2023) observes that companies which adopt structured, transparent community relations frameworks are more likely to secure and sustain this social license, and to achieve more stable long-term operating outcomes, than those that rely on ad hoc or reactive engagement.

Grievance Redress Mechanism

A grievance redress mechanism is a formalised system through which affected parties can raise concerns or complaints regarding a company's operations and receive a timely and proportionate response. The World Bank (2020) and the International Finance Corporation (2022) identify accessibility, transparency, timeliness, and fairness as the defining attributes of an effective mechanism, noting that grievance systems perceived as opaque or unresponsive tend to exacerbate, rather than resolve, community tension.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory, most closely associated with Freeman (1984), holds that a firm's long-term viability depends on its ability to identify, understand, and manage the interests of the diverse groups that can affect, or are affected by, the achievement of its objectives. Applied to the oil and gas sector, stakeholder theory provides the conceptual justification for the structured stakeholder identification, mapping, and engagement processes discussed later in this review, framing host communities not as peripheral to corporate strategy but as central stakeholders whose interests must be actively managed alongside those of shareholders, employees, and government.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory, developed by Homans (1958) and extended by Blau (1964), conceptualises relationships as an ongoing exchange of resources in which parties weigh the costs and benefits of continued interaction, with trust and commitment accumulating over successive rounds of positive reciprocal exchange. Within the community relations literature, this theoretical lens is frequently invoked to explain why consistent fulfilment of CSR commitments and responsive grievance handling tend to build durable community goodwill, whereas broken promises erode trust in a manner that can be difficult to reverse.

Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy theory, as articulated by Suchman (1995), posits that organisations seek to operate in a manner that is perceived as appropriate and justified within the norms, values, and expectations of the social system in which they are embedded. This perspective underpins the concept of the social license to operate discussed above, and helps to explain why oil and gas companies invest in visible, symbolically significant community development activities even where such activities may not yield a directly quantifiable commercial return.

Conflict Theory in Resource-Dependent Settings

A further theoretical strand, drawing on classical conflict theory as adapted to resource governance contexts, emphasises that competition over the distribution of benefits derived from a scarce and valuable resource is a structural driver of tension between extractive companies, host communities, and the state. This perspective is particularly relevant to the Niger Delta context, where perceived inequities in the distribution of oil wealth have

been repeatedly identified as an underlying driver of community agitation (Aghalino & Eyinla, 2023), and it reinforces the case for community relations frameworks that address the structural, and not merely the transactional, sources of company-community friction.

Review of Literature on Core Community Relations Practices

This section synthesises the literature and institutional guidance addressing the core functional components of community relations practice in the oil and gas sector, drawing on the conceptual and theoretical foundations established above.

Community Needs Assessment and Participatory Approaches

The literature is broadly consistent in identifying community needs assessment as the foundational activity upon which credible and locally relevant CSR programming depends. Structured needs assessment processes, typically involving multi-disciplinary teams, stakeholder consultation, and participatory data collection, are associated in the literature with improved project relevance, greater community ownership, and reduced risk of programme rejection (World Bank, 2020). Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, including community mapping, seasonal calendars, focus group discussions, wealth ranking, and problem tree analysis, feature prominently as the recommended methodological toolkit for eliciting community priorities in a manner that captures the perspectives of women, youth, and other groups whose views might otherwise be marginalised in male- or elder-dominated consultation forums. The literature further recommends that needs assessments be repeated periodically, commonly on an annual or biennial cycle, and supplemented by ad hoc assessments where major operational changes or community crises occur.

Stakeholder Identification and Mapping

Closely related to needs assessment is the practice of stakeholder identification and mapping, which the literature treats as a prerequisite for inclusive and well-targeted engagement. IPIECA (2016) guidance recommends the use of interest/influence matrices, power mapping, and social network analysis to categorise stakeholders according to their level of interest in, and capacity to influence, company operations, thereby enabling engagement resources to be allocated proportionately. The literature cautions, however, that stakeholder maps can quickly become outdated in communities characterised by frequent leadership turnover or factional contestation, and recommends periodic, typically biannual, review and updating of stakeholder registries.

Community Engagement Processes and Communication

A substantial body of literature addresses the design of community engagement processes, emphasising the importance of pre-engagement planning, culturally appropriate communication materials, and the use of local languages and trusted communication channels such as town-hall meetings, community radio, and, increasingly, mobile messaging platforms (UNDP, 2022). Record-keeping is repeatedly identified as an underappreciated but critical dimension of engagement practice: the systematic documentation of meeting minutes, resolutions, and action points is associated with improved accountability and provides an evidentiary basis for demonstrating regulatory compliance and responding to subsequent community claims.

Conflict Prevention and Resolution Mechanisms

The literature on conflict prevention in extractive settings emphasises the value of early warning systems, typically operationalised through community liaison officers and field-based rumour tracking, that allow companies to detect and respond to rising tension before it escalates into overt conflict. Joint dialogue forums involving company, community, and regulatory representatives, together with mediation processes led by trained mediators or respected community elders, are widely recommended as mechanisms for resolving disputes at the lowest possible level, with escalation to formal arbitration reserved for matters that cannot be resolved through dialogue (Nnadozie & Obasi, 2022).

Grievance Redress Mechanisms

Building on the conceptual discussion in Section 3.5, the empirical and institutional literature converges on several defining features of an effective grievance redress mechanism: accessible, multi-channel complaint lodging (in-person, digital, and anonymous); clearly defined acknowledgement and resolution timelines, commonly cited as acknowledgement within 48 hours and substantive resolution within approximately 14 working days; and systematic documentation through grievance logbooks maintained at community liaison offices. The literature emphasises that the perceived fairness and responsiveness of the grievance mechanism, rather than its mere existence on paper, is the principal determinant of whether it succeeds in building or eroding community trust (IFC, 2022).

Memoranda of Understanding as Governance Instruments

Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between companies and host communities are discussed in the literature as instruments that formalise mutual expectations regarding development goals, timelines, roles, and reporting mechanisms. Good practice guidance recommends that MoUs be negotiated transparently with meaningful community input, signed by company representatives, recognised traditional or community leaders, and neutral witnesses, and reviewed periodically, typically every two to three years, to accommodate changing community priorities and operational circumstances.

Corporate Social Responsibility Project Implementation

The literature on CSR project implementation in the oil and gas sector identifies relevance to assessed needs, long-term sustainability, and potential to improve livelihoods, education, or health outcomes as the principal criteria for project selection. Project lifecycle management, spanning planning, budgeting, execution through qualified local contractors and community members, and formal handover with accompanying training for sustainability, is recommended as a structured approach that mitigates the risk of poorly conceived or unsustainable interventions (Nwankwo & Ifejika Speranza, 2020).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is presented in the literature as essential to demonstrating the effectiveness of community relations investment and to generating the evidence base required for continuous improvement. Recommended key performance indicators include the number of beneficiaries reached, employment generated, satisfaction levels reported by community respondents, and the operational uptime of community infrastructure. Mid-term reviews, end-of-project evaluations, and participatory impact assessments involving both community representatives and external reviewers are widely recommended as complementary M&E modalities, with the resulting lessons feeding back into subsequent project planning cycles.

Regulatory and Legal Framework Governing Community Relations in Nigeria

Compliance with the applicable legal and regulatory framework is treated in the literature as a precondition for the legitimacy and sustainability of community relations activity in Nigeria's oil and gas sector. Three principal instruments feature prominently in the reviewed literature and guidance documents.

The Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content Development Act, 2010

The Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content Development (NOGICD) Act, 2010, mandates the prioritisation of Nigerian and, by extension, host-community participation in the employment and contracting practices of oil and gas companies operating in the country. The literature identifies local employment targets, community-based procurement, and human capital development through skills training as the principal compliance obligations arising from the Act, with reporting to the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB) forming an integral part of the compliance architecture (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010; Ovadia, 2016).

The Environmental Impact Assessment Act, Cap E12, LFN 2004

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act requires the conduct of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments for new projects with potential environmental effects, together with the engagement of host communities in EIA scoping, consultation, and public disclosure processes, and the incorporation of mitigation and compensation plans for affected communities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004; Federal Ministry of Environment, 2021). The literature notes that early and genuine community involvement in the EIA process, rather than pro forma consultation conducted after key project decisions have already been taken, is associated with more durable community acceptance of project outcomes.

Local Government and Community-Level Governance Structures

Beyond national legislation, the literature emphasises the need for community relations practice to be harmonised with local government bye-laws and traditional governance structures, including the protocols governing entry into a community, the securing of permits and endorsements at the ward or local government area level, and collaboration with community development committees, youth councils, and women's groups (Delta State Government, 2023). This layered governance environment requires community relations practitioners to navigate simultaneously the requirements of national statute, subnational regulation, and customary authority.

Risk Management in Community Relations: A Review of the Literature

Typology of Community-Related Risks

The literature identifies a recurring typology of risks associated with company-community interaction in the oil and gas sector. These include community protests and agitations arising from perceived neglect or unmet promises; vandalism and sabotage of company infrastructure motivated by grievance or criminal intent; unrealistic community expectations fuelled by misinformation or political influence; inter-community conflict over project siting, employment distribution, or boundary claims; grievance escalation attributable to delayed or poor complaint resolution; cultural or religious insensitivity resulting from inadequate attention to local custom; and leadership disputes within or between community factions that can stall negotiation and project implementation (Nnadozie & Obasi, 2022; Aghalino & Eyinla, 2023).

Risk Mitigation Strategies

Corresponding to this risk typology, the literature recommends a suite of mitigation strategies, including early stakeholder engagement commencing at project conception; clear, consistent, and culturally appropriate communication of project scope, timelines, and limitations; robust grievance redress mechanisms operating within defined resolution timelines; community-based early warning systems staffed by community liaison officers and field personnel; capacity-building and conflict-sensitivity training for company staff and local stakeholders; transparent and equitable criteria for employment and project-siting decisions; collaborative security arrangements involving law enforcement, traditional authorities, and community youth groups; and periodic risk assessment and scenario planning to accommodate emerging threats. The consistency with which these recommendations recur across institutional and scholarly sources suggests a reasonably strong, if not yet fully empirically validated, consensus on the core elements of effective community risk management in the sector.

Capacity Building and Local Content Development

Capacity building and local content development are treated in the literature as pillars of sustainable community relations that extend the benefits of oil and gas operations beyond the immediate project lifecycle, in alignment with the NOGICD Act's local content mandate (Ovadia, 2016).

Local Employment and Labour Force Participation

The literature recommends measurable local employment targets, commonly cited illustratively at around sixty percent of the casual workforce drawn from host communities, supported by a community labour database and equitable job distribution across youth, women, and other community segments. Quarterly review of progress against employment targets is recommended as a mechanism for sustaining accountability.

Community Training and Skills Development Programmes

Technical and vocational training in trades such as welding, pipe fitting, electrical installation, and fabrication, complemented by soft-skills and entrepreneurship training and Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) certification, is widely recommended as a means of preparing community members for both direct employment within the sector and independent livelihood generation.

Partnership with accredited training institutions and non-governmental organisations, together with the issuance of industry-recognised certification, is identified as good practice for enhancing the credibility and transferability of training outcomes.

Vendor and Contractor Inclusion

The inclusion of local businesses within the company's supply chain, through community vendor registers, capacity development support for bidding and compliance, reserved procurement quotas for prequalified local businesses, and joint ventures between indigenous and established contractors, is presented in the literature as a mechanism for embedding economic benefit within host communities beyond direct employment and philanthropic CSR spending.

Ethical Considerations in Community Relations

Fairness, Anti-Corruption, and Avoidance of Undue Influence

The literature places considerable emphasis on the ethical imperative of fairness and integrity in community relations practice, cautioning that favouritism, corruption, or the alignment of company initiatives with partisan political or factional community interests can rapidly undermine trust and expose the company to reputational and legal risk.

Recommended safeguards include merit-based selection criteria for employment, training, and contracting opportunities; prohibitions on bribes, kickbacks, and personal inducements; internal and external audit of community-related expenditure; and the establishment of anonymous whistle-blowing channels.

Gender Equity and Social Inclusion

A further ethical dimension addressed in the literature concerns the inclusion of women, youth, and other historically marginalised groups in community decision-making forums and development programming. Recommended practices include the design of training, employment, and empowerment initiatives that explicitly address the barriers faced by women and youth; the provision of gender-sensitive grievance channels that enable safe reporting of harassment or exclusion; and the use of inclusive language and culturally sensitive communication materials across all engagement activities.

Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

Table 1 presents a synthesis of the core functional domains addressed in this review, summarising the principal practices identified in the literature, the key institutional and scholarly sources anchoring each domain, and illustrative performance indicators that recur across the reviewed sources.

Table 1: Synthesis of Core Community Relations Domains, Practices, and Indicators

Functional Domain	Core Practices Identified in the Literature	Key Institutional/Scholarly Anchors	Suggested Performance Indicator
Needs Assessment	Participatory Rural Appraisal, community mapping, focus group discussions, needs validation sessions	IFC (2022); World Bank (2020)	Frequency and coverage of assessments
Stakeholder Mapping	Interest/influence matrices, power mapping, social network analysis, periodic registry updates	IPIECA (2016)	Currency of stakeholder registry
Engagement and Communication	Town-hall meetings, consultative forums, multilingual and multi-channel communication	UNDP (2022)	Number and reach of engagement sessions
Grievance Redress	Defined acknowledgement and resolution timelines, grievance logbooks, anonymous reporting channels	World Bank (2020); IFC (2022)	Average resolution time; recurrence rate
CSR Implementation	Needs-aligned project selection, phased lifecycle management, community handover protocols	Nnadozie & Obasi (2022); Nwankwo & Ifejika Speranza (2020)	Beneficiary numbers; sustainability rating
Regulatory Compliance	Local content quotas, environmental and social impact assessments, permits and clearances	NOGICD Act (2010); EIA Act (2004)	Compliance audit outcomes

Taken together, the reviewed literature suggests a reasonably mature body of institutional and scholarly guidance on the individual components of community relations practice, with a marked degree of convergence around the principles of transparency, inclusion, cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and accountability. However, as discussed further in Section 11, this maturity at the level of individual components is not matched by an equivalent maturity in integrated frameworks that specify how these components should be sequenced, resourced, and governed within a single coherent standard operating procedure applicable across diverse company and community contexts.

Gaps in the Literature and Directions for Future Research

Several gaps emerge from this review that warrant attention in future scholarship. First, the literature remains predominantly descriptive and prescriptive rather than empirically evaluative: relatively few studies have subjected specific community relations interventions, such as particular grievance redress designs or MoU structures, to rigorous outcome evaluation using pre- and post-intervention data or comparative case designs, leaving open questions about which specific design features are most strongly associated with reduced conflict and improved community satisfaction.

Second, there is a paucity of comparative research examining how community relations frameworks perform across different company ownership structures (international oil companies, indigenous independents, and state-owned entities), operating contexts (onshore versus offshore, mature versus frontier acreage), and community typologies (riverine versus upland, ethnically homogenous versus heterogeneous communities). Such comparative research would help to clarify the extent to which the broadly convergent good-practice principles identified in this review require context-specific adaptation.

Third, the literature has yet to substantially address the implications for community relations practice of the global energy transition and the gradual diversification of extractive companies into renewable energy and decommissioning activities. As oil and gas assets approach the end of their productive life, community relations frameworks will need to address decommissioning-related employment displacement, the repurposing of community infrastructure, and the management of community expectations regarding continued corporate presence, an area that remains underexplored in the current body of knowledge.

Fourth, the growing availability of digital tools, including geographic information systems for stakeholder mapping, mobile-based grievance reporting platforms, and data analytics for monitoring and evaluation, represents an emerging area in which the literature has not yet caught up with practice. Future research could usefully examine the effectiveness, accessibility, and equity implications of digital community engagement tools, particularly in rural host communities where connectivity and digital literacy may be uneven.

Finally, there is scope for further theoretical development that more explicitly integrates the stakeholder, social exchange, legitimacy, and conflict-theoretic perspectives discussed in Section 4 into a unified explanatory model of company-community relations in resource-dependent settings, rather than treating these perspectives as parallel but disconnected lenses.

Implications for Practice and Policy

For oil and gas operators, this review suggests that the codification of community relations practice into a single, internally consistent standard operating procedure, rather than the maintenance of discrete, loosely coordinated initiatives, offers a practical pathway to improved consistency, auditability, and organisational learning. Embedding the functional domains synthesised in Table 1 within clearly assigned organisational roles, from community liaison officers at the grassroots level to a corporate community relations manager with oversight responsibility, is likely to enhance both the responsiveness and the accountability of community engagement.

For regulators and policymakers, the review highlights the continuing importance of harmonising national legislation, such as the NOGICD Act and the EIA Act, with subnational and customary governance arrangements, and suggests that regulatory guidance could be strengthened by more explicit specification of minimum standards for grievance redress timelines, stakeholder mapping frequency, and CSR project monitoring, drawing on the good-practice benchmarks identified across the reviewed institutional sources.

For community development practitioners and civil society organisations, the review underscores the importance of participatory needs assessment and inclusive stakeholder mapping as safeguards against the marginalisation of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups within community decision-making processes, and suggests a continuing advocacy role in monitoring the fidelity with which companies implement the participatory principles to which they nominally subscribe.

CONCLUSION

This review has synthesised the extant literature and institutional guidance on community relations practice in the oil and gas industry, with particular attention to the Nigerian operating context. The review has shown that a substantial and broadly convergent body of guidance exists on the individual components of community relations, needs assessment, stakeholder mapping, engagement, conflict prevention and resolution, grievance redress, MoU development, CSR implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, anchored in stakeholder, social exchange, legitimacy, and conflict-theoretic perspectives, and reinforced by a layered regulatory framework spanning national legislation and local governance structures.

At the same time, the review has identified important gaps, particularly the relative scarcity of empirically evaluative research on specific intervention designs, limited comparative analysis across company and community typologies, underdeveloped attention to the implications of the energy transition, and an emerging but as yet under-researched role for digital engagement tools. Addressing these gaps through future empirical inquiry would strengthen the evidentiary basis upon which community relations standard operating procedures

are constructed, and would support the broader industry objective of building trust, reducing conflict, and securing a durable social license to operate within host communities.

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