

INVOLUNTARY RESETTLEMENT AND CONFLICT IN EGI COMMUNITIES OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

CHIZOR WISDOM DIKE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY

NKPOLU, OROWORUOKO, PORT HARCOURT,

RIVERS STATE

Abstract

The acquisition of land for socio-economic development by oil/gas multi-nationals in the Niger Delta has resulted in massive displacement of rural communities from their tradition means of livelihood. Moreso, forceful acquisition of land for oil/gas exploration and production activities has generated internal and external conflicts within the host communities leading to serious grievances and conflicts. This paper examines the impacts of involuntary resettlement of private and communal land in Egi communities and the associated conflicts which result from such displacements. Aware of the need to manage the needs and rights of communities and oil companies in oil producing areas, the paper recommends a proper resettlement plan to avoid conflicts and crises which result from involuntary resettlement.

Introduction

Each time land is acquired for development projects by corporate organizations or multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta, there is a form of displacement of people from their inheritance. This displacement takes the form of livelihood loss without adequate and proper compensation, environmental damage, loss of important economic resources, loss of habitation and physical separation.

In Egi communities of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria, TotalEnergies has operated for more than 50 years. In these fifty years, TotalEnergies (formerly Total E & P Nigeria Ltd) has acquired more than one thousand (1000) hectares of land from various communities in Egi land. These acquisitions have generated so much misgivings, conflict and displacement among the people. In some cases, the company resorted to involuntary resettlement of those affected by the land acquisition. These involuntary resettlements were done without proper sociological and economic considerations. The process, over the years, has generated unresolved conflicts which continue to mount pressure on both the company and the communities.

The concept of voluntary resettlement, in sociological terms, is designed to give the victims

of land acquisition, livelihood loss, and ecological displacement, the opportunity to properly negotiate a settlement of the issues, which results in a better bargain, financial gain, economic resolving and social re-connection in a new place within agreed terms and conditions. On the other hand, involuntary resettlement pushes the victims of land acquisition or displacement by projects to a new experience, social and economic discomfort, disconnection, apathy, worry and aggression.

Background of the Study Area

Egi Land (made up of 16 communities) is about 100km Northwest from Port Harcourt and lies between Lat. 5° 13"N-5° 15"N and Long. 6° 36" E-6° 39" E in the North-Western guardant of Rivers State, Nigeria. The Egi vegetation is characterized by freshwater swamp and tropical rainforest with sandy, clay and loamy soils, in depth variations and sustained by rich wetlands and floodplains. Two seasons are prominent here: dry and wet seasons.

Egi communities are major landlords to TotalEnergies. Egi is part of Ogba/Egbema/ Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers state. Egi land is bound on the West by River Orashi and on the East by Sombreiro River within the Eastern Niger Delta Area. Egi is midway between two major

urban centres (towns) – Omoku Town (headquarters of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA (North)) and Ahoada Town, headquarters of Ahoada East LGA (South). Social, economic and political interactions among the 16 Egi communities are deep-rooted. These alliances are sustained by traditional social networks (lineages) and cultural institutions. Egi is part of Ogba ethnic nationality in Rivers State.

Oil and gas production activities have been conducted directly in nine (9) of the communities, namely: Ogbogu, Obagi, Oboburu, Obite, Akabuka, Erema, Egita Akabta, Obiyebe. The impacts of the land acquisition and other production activities have affected the communities directly and indirectly. There is a new pattern of dispute which has arisen in the area due to displacement and involuntary resettlement by the oil company.

The problem of involuntary resettlement in Egi

Conflicts arising from land acquisition and displacement from traditional sources of livelihood in Egi communities have assumed frightening dimensions. There have been several discussions, disagreements and confrontations among community members and between the community and Total. In desperate acts of resorting to quick impact measures without clear study, planning, consultations and community engagement, TotalEnergies rushed to package some involuntary resettlement actions.

The underlying issue is that awareness about the serious impacts of land displacement

The primary goal of any involuntary resettlement process is to prevent impoverishment and improve the livelihood of resettlers. To do this, governments and technical agencies must understand the economics of dispossession, impoverishment, and recovery and plan for growth at the relocation site. Displaced populations face a specific set of risks. These atypical risks are not addressed in routine project economic analysis. Robust empirical evidence has shown that, in most cases, these overlooked and little understood risks result in accumulated deprivations and severe impoverishment.

Social, psychological and economic effects of such land acquisitions and resettlements are far-reaching despite the compensation terms

The theory of payment of adequate compensation that the expropriated party should be put in exactly the same position as he was before his property was acquired; no more, no less. However, there is sometimes a lot of misgiving especially on the part

and livelihood has increased among community members. TotalEnergies has acquired massive lands for oil/gas production activities, which includes accommodation and offices. These acquisitions have affected community's members. Some of them have been compensated, while some who were displaced have been involuntary resettled. The impacts of such involuntary resettlement have created a new pattern of conflicts in the communities.

How have the oil companies and the communities managed their relationships under involuntary resettlement arrangements? Has the settlement yielded the required enabling environment for peaceful co-existence in the area? Are there unresolved issues between TotalEnergies and Egi communities over land acquisition? Were the proper governmental agencies involved in the resettlement plans and actions?

This paper argues that the cost-benefit analysis, conflict management, conventional project risk and social sensitivity analyses adopted in the involuntary resettlement actions, are incapable of resolving socio-economic challenges and tension inherent in the land acquisition deals. Rather, more problems are being created for present and future generations of community members. In a land-conscious society like Nigeria, great effort must be put to sort out the sensitive issues involved in land acquisition, displacement and resettlement. Cernea (1999:6) asserts that:

between the land-owners and the companies involved. According to Uduehi (1987,135):

of disposed owners who realize that adequate compensation may be less than "full compensation". This ideal situation where full compensation is paid can scarcely prevail because of the socio-economic status of the person being disposed.

There are available sociological tools to be used in managing risks, conflicts and social sensitivities arising from involuntary resettlements. The problem is, the companies and their agents do not understand these tools and, therefore, do not care to apply appropriate social management plans during such land acquisitions and resettlement.

The result of this negligence has been social dislocation of families, intra-and inter-communal land disputes and lack of social cohesion during and after project delivery by the companies.

Objectives of the Study

1. Determine the cases of involuntary resettlement actions in Egi Communities resulting from land acquisition by corporate organizations.
2. Examine the social and economic impacts of involuntary resettlements in Egi Communities.
3. Make recommendations for managing social issues arising from land acquisitions and resettlement actions.

Theoretical Framework

Many years of sociological research have generated a body of knowledge on resettlement actions. This knowledge has assisted practitioners and policy-makers in drawing conclusions and recommendations. For this study, we adopt the Basic Human Needs Theory to explain the relationship between resettlement of displaced persons and conflict management. Human needs theory expounds that all human beings have basic needs, and meeting those needs can lead to serious conflicts.

Shelter, food, safety and social interactions (love) are basic humans' needs which are delivered through habitation, co-habitation and settlement. Any activity which threatens individual and group survival, especially their livelihoods and access to resources, is a source of conflict.

Carr-Hill (2002:7-8) provides a useful catalogue of elements of quality of life which is regarded as the foundation of basic needs. Among these are:

- An income and economic security are the prerequisites of satisfying material needs so that livelihood depends on one's personal economic situation.
- A physical shelter and hospital environment are essential for warmth, food and water; hence the physical environment is basic.
- The social relationship within which our daily life is enmeshed defines our personality; hence the nature of the personality depends on the social environment.

Social knowledge about the processes and impacts of voluntary and involuntary resettlement among practitioners and rural dwellers are more intensive and very substantive. Displacement issues present social concerns which can no longer be tolerated in communities.

Conceptual Clarifications

Clearly, the three concepts which provide working definitions for us are resettlement, involuntary resettlement and conflict resolution.

Resettlement

Involves a formal relocation of people from their original habitation due largely to displacement. It could be voluntary or involuntary based on the social engagements, discussions and negotiations between the affected persons and the authorities or organizations.

Involuntary resettlement is a forceful relocation of people from their habitation due to environmental consequences or project activities which adversely affect the people directly.

Involuntary

Resettlement is geared towards preventing impoverishment and to improve the livelihood and survival of the resettles.

To achieve this, the authorities, technical agencies and companies involved must understand the sociology and economics of displacement, dispossession, impoverishment, recovery, and plan for sustenance and growth at the relocation sites. Displaced persons face a lot of risks and impacts, which are specific, direct and long term.

Conflict

Is an undesirable situation and disagreement between two or more parties within a geographical space and time? Conflict

resolution, therefore, enables the parties in conflict to build social harmony and transform their relationship to new levels of co-existence.

Research Design

We used the survey method in this research to gather data from affected individuals, households, and communities.

We also used purposive sampling to choose the communities within the four zones of Egi Clan for this study.

Table 1: Selected Communities in Egi

S/N	Zone	Communities Chosen
1	Egi Etit	•Akubuka, • Ogbogu, • Obite, • Ede
2	Umu-Obor	• Obagi, • Oboburu
3	Ahiah	• Erema, • Ibewa
4	Uso-Ozimini	• Obiyebe, • Egita

Data Analysis

The following data represent the set of lands belonging to communities which TotalEnergies acquired from various communities in Egi land for oil/gas production activities. Such

activities range from borrow pits, sludge control pits, oil/gas wells location sites, pipeline right-of-way, camp sites, dump sites, materials storage sites, etc.

Phase 1:

Table 2: Land take for oil/gas wells, location sites and other production facilities

S/N	Period	Communities	Land Size Acquired
1	1964 – 1974	• Obagi • Ogbogu • Oboburu • Akabuka	75 hectares 160 hectares 42 hectares 31 hectares
2	1975 – 1985	• Ogbogu • Obagi • Oboburu • Erema • Ibewa • Obite	166 hectares 96 hectares 60 hectares 10 hectares 4 hectares 6 hectares
3	1986 – 1995	• Ogbogu • Obite • Obiyebe • Akabuka • Obagi • Oboburu	65 hectares 4 hectares 1 hectares 12 hectares 49 hectares 22 hectares
4	1996 – 2006	• Ogbogu • Obagi • Obite • Akabuka	70 hectares 26.6 hectares 62 hectares 9.2 hectares

Source: Land acquired for the OML 58/IPP/Upgrade Project (First Phase)

Phase 2:

S/N	Period	Communities	Land Size Acquired
	2007 – 2014 OML-58 IPP/ Upgrade Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ogbogu • Obite • Obagi • Akubuka • Obiyebe • Egita • Oboburu 	82.2535 hectares 83.26 hectares 8.0238 hectares 18.13 hectares 8.4309 hectares 4.864 hectares 0.3067 hectares
		• Ede	2.56 hectares

Source: Total/Egi Oil & Gas Families IPP-OUR- Upgrade Agreement, 2009.

Phase 3:

Table 3: Land Acquired for the OML-58 IPP Upgrade Project (Second Phase)

S/N	Period	Communities	Land Size Hectares
1	2007 – 2014	• Obiyebe	9.1095 ha
		Egita	4.864 ha
		Oboburu	0.3067 ha
		Obagi	8.0238 ha
		Ede	2.56 ha
		Akabuka	26.186 ha
		Ogbogu	87.5494 ha
		Obite	84.1 ha

Source: Total/Egi Oil & Gas Families IPP – OUR Upgrade Agreement, 2009

Phase 4:

Table 6.4: Land acquired by Total as Buffer Zone arising from the 2012 Gas Eruption

Period	Communities	Land take in hectares
2013	Egita Obite Ogbogu Obiyebe	150 ha

Source: 2014 Special Agreement between Total/Egi Clan

Findings

1. Massive loss of arable land in host communities of Egi land to shortage of land for agricultural purpose.
2. Inter-and inter-communal land disputes among host communities.
3. Loss of rural livelihoods, especially among farmers, hunters and fishermen.
4. Lands acquired were not properly valued and the process of acquisition negates the basic rules of valuation.
5. Unresolved cases of compensation between Total Energies and the Communities with regional to land acquire for Obite upgrade project.
6. Payment of unnegotiated sums of money as annual rents.
7. Increase in cases of rural poverty in Egi Communities
8. Lack of resettlement plan for impacted landlords and landowners in the host communities.
9. The problem of alienation of land from a voluntary transfer to involuntary resettlement leading to permanent loss of right to private or communal land.

10. There is a strong argument to engage in trade-off analysis where the cost of settlement of impacted persons is considered along with the benefits of the proposed project to the impacted persons or communities.

Outline of a Resettlement Action Plan

The International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, has provided comprehensive guidelines for voluntary and involuntary resettlements:

- Introduction
- Minimizing Resettlement
- Census and Socioeconomic Surveys
- Legal Framework
- Resettlement Sites
- Income Restoration
- Institutional Arrangements
- Implementation Schedule
- Participation and Consultation
- Grievance Redress
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Costs and Budgets
- Annexes

Conclusion

This study examined the causes of involuntary resettlement in Egi communities due largely to land acquisition by multi-national oil company, total Energies. The findings show that the people have been displaced from their traditional means of livelihoods without alternative resource management plan. Young people, women and men have become jobless within their communities heightening tension, poverty and conflicts.

There is an intense struggle for available land space in the affected communities, a situation which has encouraged litigations between TotalEnergies and the communities. Involuntary displacements and resettlements affect poor people which require special attention and careful planning before project execution.

Recommendations

The leadership of Egi communities should take proactive steps to resolving the issues of conflict resulting from involuntary resettlement of land owners in the communities. Total Energies should begin a process of stakeholder's re-engagement in the communities to determine status of land disputes involving the company. There should be alternative resource management plan to cater for the basic socio-economic needs of the people who were displaced from their lands. A comprehensive resettlement plan should be developed by the stakeholders in the area to address the problem.

Social impact assessments should be conducted prior to the acquisition of communal land or resettlement of affected land owners.

References

- Cernea, M. M. (1999). *The Economics of Involuntary Resettlement: Questions and Challenges*. The World Bank, Washington, D. C. USA.
- Carr-Hill, R. (2012). *Measuring Well-being. Radical Statistics Group*. <https://www.radstats.org.uk>
- Etekpe, A. et al, (ed.) (2010). *Conflict Management and Resolution in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Perspective*. Pearl Publishers, Port Harcourt.
- Fekumo, J. F. (2002). *Principles of Nigerian Customary Land Law*. F. & F. Publishers, Port Harcourt.
- International Finance Corporation (2002). *Handbook for Preparing a Resettlement Action Plan*, Washington, D. C. USA.
- Payne, G. ed. (2006). *Social Divisions*. Macmillan, New York, N. Y., USA.
- Schellenberg, J. A. (1982). *The Source of Conflict*. Oxford University Press, New York, USA.
- Uduehi, G. O. (1987). *Public Lands Acquisition and Compensation Practice in Nigeria*. John West Publications Ltd. Lagos.