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Stakeholders' Influence on Crisis Management by Sterling Global's Oil Resources and the Host Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study examined stakeholders' influence on crisis management between Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited and its host communities in Esit Eket Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 23,930 residents of Etebi Idung Akpaisang, Etebi Idung Iniang and Ikot Afaha Eket, with a sample size of 393 respondents determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages. The findings showed that environmental pollution (31.3%) was the dominant cause of crisis, while crises occurred most frequently two to three times (36.3%). Community youths (34.0%) were identified as the stakeholder group mostly involved in crisis occurrence, while traditional rulers (27.0%) were most involved in crisis resolution. Dialogue and negotiation (39.3%) emerged as the most frequently adopted crisis management strategy and was also rated the most effective strategy (42.0%). The dominant outcome of crisis management was reduction in conflicts (33.7%), while 39.3% of respondents rated the strategies as effective. Poor communication (28.0%) was identified as the major challenge, unfulfilled agreements (29.0%) as the major cause of recurring crises, and regular dialogue (31.0%) as the most preferred measure for improvement. The study concludes that sustainable crisis management requires not only dialogue but also credible stakeholder participation, effective communication and consistent implementation of agreements reached between the company and its host communities. The study recommends that Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited should institutionalise regular dialogue with host communities, strengthen stakeholder participation in decision-making, improve communication channels, and ensure prompt implementation of agreements reached with community stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's oil-producing communities have for decades occupied an uneasy space between national economic dependence on petroleum revenue and the lived reality of environmental degradation, unmet promises, and recurring unrest. As recently as August 2025, a coalition calling itself the Niger Delta Volunteers publicly confronted Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Company operating in Akwa Ibom State, demanding improved corporate engagement over unresolved grievances bordering on employment, environmental responsibility, and community development (AllAfrica, 2025). This is not an isolated flashpoint. A 2023 investigation by the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations highlights that gas flaring in the Niger Delta remains among the worst in the world, a practice that continues largely unchecked despite existing regulation and that fuels chronic ill-health and community resentment (News Agency of Nigeria [NAN], 2025). The United Nations Environment Programme's (2011) landmark assessment of Ogoniland similarly documented that decades of unremediated spills have left host communities without trust in the international oil companies operating on their land. These are not abstractions confined to policy reports; they are recurring, measurable events with real figures, real casualties to livelihoods, and real consequences for the corporations that must eventually restore normal operations.

These cases trigger crises in this setting are rarely spontaneous; they typically accumulate from long-standing sources of friction such as environmental pollution, unmet compensation expectations, unemployment among community youths, and unfulfilled corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments (Hamilton, 2011). Ebisi, Guo, and Soomro (2025) observe that when CSR initiatives are perceived as superficial or self-serving rather than a genuine response to ecological harm, they can intensify rather than defuse tension, sometimes provoking protest or sabotage. Crisis, then, is best understood not as a single incident but as the visible eruption of an underlying and often cumulative stakeholder grievance, which is precisely why its management cannot be separated from the quality of stakeholder relationships that precede it.

This calls for crisis management endeavours. In the Niger Delta, this has historically ranged from dialogue and negotiation, through compensation and community development projects, to, in more severe cases, security intervention or legal action (Hamilton, 2011). Akpaka (2020) found that Nigerian oil and gas managers who relied on multifaceted communication, sustained dialogue, and negotiation processes were more likely to achieve durable stakeholder buy-in than those who treated crisis response as a one-off transactional fix. Crisis management, in other words, is only as effective as the stakeholder relationships on which it is built; a strategy imposed without genuine engagement tends to produce temporary calm rather than lasting resolution.

In host communities of the Niger Delta, engagement is rarely a neutral technical exercise; it is bound up with questions of who is consulted, who benefits from compensation schemes, and whose voice is treated as authoritative when disputes arise ((Freeman, Dmytriyev, & Phillips, 2021) Oyedele & Stoddart, 2026). Stakeholder engagement is the deliberate process by which an organisation identifies these groups, listens to their concerns, and incorporates their expectations into its operational decisions (Ekanem, Umoh, & Oyokunyi, 2025). Where engagement is genuine and inclusive, it tends to build the trust that companies need to operate with a measure of social acceptance; where it is tokenistic, it deepens the very grievances it was meant to manage. Weak or exclusionary stakeholder engagement generates the conditions for crisis, and the durability of any crisis management strategy depends on the extent to which it restores meaningful stakeholder participation.

According to Oyedele and Stoddart (2026), observed that in Niger Delta formal engagement structures exist mostly on paper but are in practice dominated by more institutionalised actors, leaving grassroots stakeholders alienated and more prone to confrontation. Sam and Zibima (2023), observed that a lack of trust and confidence in the drivers of the decision-making process constrained meaningful stakeholder involvement, regardless of the formal participation channels that existed. These findings echo Hamilton's (2011) earlier argument that inadequate community relations, rather than the mere existence of oil operations, is what precipitates industry-community crises.

Beyond this convergence, however, the literature also reveals important points of divergence. Some scholars emphasise structural and legal remedies: Egbon, Nwoke, and Agbaitoro (2024) argue that voluntary CSR has consistently failed to resolve corporate-community conflict in the Nigerian oil industry and that only a law-mandated CSR framework, backed by enforceable duties, can close the gap left by decades of self-regulation. Others, including Akpaka (2020) and Ekanem et al. (2025), place greater weight on relational and communicative remedies, contending that sustained dialogue, multifaceted communication, and proactive engagement can mitigate conflict even within existing voluntary frameworks. A further divergence concerns whose influence matters most: while Oyedele and Stoddart (2026) foreground the gatekeeping role of NGOs and funders in shaping whose voice reaches decision-makers, Ebisi et al. (2025) foreground the affected community members themselves as the most credible evaluators of whether CSR and engagement are authentic.

What remains comparatively underexplored, however, is a systematic, community-level empirical account of precisely which stakeholder groups drive both the causes and the resolution of crises, which specific management strategies host communities themselves rate as most effective, and what residual challenges persist even where dialogue-based engagement is already the dominant strategy in use. It is this specific gap that the present study addresses. Existing scholarship has richly theorised the stakeholder-crisis relationship and documented its structural drivers at a regional or policy level, but only few studies explicitly examine the role of stakeholders to determine, empirically, how host community members themselves rank the causes of crisis, the stakeholders involved, the strategies deployed, and the outcomes achieved, within a single, clearly bounded corporate-community relationship.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Crisis between oil-producing companies and their host communities remains one of the most persistent threats to stable operations in Nigeria's petroleum sector. These disruptions carry real costs: production downtime for the company, loss of livelihoods and trust for residents, and a cycle of temporary settlements that rarely address the deeper grievances driving the unrest. Over the years, both the company and various stakeholder groups (traditional rulers, youth leaders, government agencies, and community development committees) have responded with a mix of dialogue, compensation, community relations projects, and, occasionally, security or legal intervention, yet crises continue to recur, suggesting that current approaches address the symptoms of discontent more consistently than their underlying causes.

Scholars have made considerable efforts to understand this pattern, variously attributing it to weak corporate social responsibility implementation, exclusionary engagement structures that privilege more institutionalised actors over grassroots voices, and a persistent trust deficit between communities and the companies operating on their land. What remains less clear, however, is how host community members themselves; rather than corporate managers, regulators, or outside analysts, perceive and rank the relative influence of different stakeholder groups on both the emergence and resolution of these crises, and which specific management strategies they consider genuinely effective as opposed to merely temporary.

Without this community-level, evidence-based understanding, crisis management interventions risk being designed around assumptions rather than the documented preferences and experiences of those most directly affected, leaving companies such as Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited to repeat costly cycles of conflict and short-lived resolution. It is this gap that makes the present study both timely and necessary: what influence do stakeholders actually exert on the management of crisis between Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited and its host communities in Esit Eket Local Government Area, and how effective do those most affected consider the strategies currently in use?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

i. Determine the dominant causes and frequency of crises between Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited and its host communities.
ii. Identify the stakeholder groups most influential in the occurrence and resolution of crises.
iii. Examine the crisis management strategies adopted by stakeholders in the study area.
iv. Assess the effectiveness and outcomes of the crisis management strategies adopted.
v. Determine the challenges affecting effective crisis management and the measures that could improve it.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

i. What are the dominant causes and frequency of crises between Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited and its host communities?
ii. Which stakeholder groups are most influential in the occurrence and resolution of crises?
iii. What crisis management strategies are adopted by stakeholders in the study area?
iv. How effective are the crisis management strategies adopted, and what outcomes have they produced?
v. What challenges affect effective crisis management, and what measures could improve it?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stakeholders and Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder concept originated in strategic management as a deliberate counterpoint to the shareholder-primacy view of the firm, with Freeman (1984) defining a stakeholder as any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of an organisation's objectives. This definition was significant because it formally extended managerial responsibility beyond shareholders to include employees, suppliers, customers, communities, and government, each recognised as holding a legitimate stake in organisational conduct. In extractive industry settings, this broadened conception is particularly consequential, since host communities (who hold no equity in the company yet bear the most direct social and environmental consequences of its operations) are thereby recognised as central rather than peripheral to corporate decision-making (Freeman, Dmytriyev, & Phillips, 2021). Subsequent theorists have refined the concept further, distinguishing stakeholders by the legitimacy, power, and urgency of their claims, a distinction that helps explain why some community voices are consistently prioritised in corporate engagement while others are marginalised.

Building on this foundation, stakeholder engagement has come to be understood as the structured, ongoing process through which an organisation identifies relevant stakeholders, communicates with them, and incorporates their expectations into its operational and social decisions (Ekanem, Umoh, & Oyokunyi, 2025). Ekanem et al. (2025) found that innovations in stakeholder engagement and communication in the oil and gas sector (including proactive, multi-channel outreach rather than reactive crisis communication) not only reduced conflict and operational risk but also strengthened trust and long-term relationships between companies and their host communities. This finding underscores that engagement is most effective when it precedes rather than merely follows a crisis, functioning as a preventive rather than purely remedial mechanism. In practice, however, genuine engagement requires companies to share decision-making power to some degree, which many are reluctant to do given the operational and financial stakes involved.

This reluctance is precisely where much of the empirical literature locates the roots of failure. Oyedele and Stoddart (2026) describe a persistent tension in Niger Delta oil communities between the pluralist ideal of inclusive stakeholder participation and the practical reality of "agency capture," in which formal engagement structures exist but are dominated by more institutionalised actors such as non-governmental organisations and project funders, leaving ordinary community members feeling unheard despite nominal consultation. Similarly, Sam and Zibima (2023) found that even where structures for community involvement exist, a lack of trust and confidence in those driving the process can suppress meaningful participation, particularly among historically excluded groups. Together, these studies suggest that stakeholder engagement in the Nigerian oil sector is frequently more symbolic than substantive, a gap between formal process and lived experience that helps to explain why crises recur even in communities with established engagement mechanisms.

Crisis in Host Community-Corporate Relations

Crisis, within the corporate-community relations literature, refers to a disruptive event or escalating condition that threatens the stability of the relationship between an organisation and the stakeholders affected by its operations. In the Niger Delta specifically, Hamilton (2011) documented that oil and gas companies have repeatedly encountered community crises ranging from peaceful protest to violent confrontation, and that these crises consistently and negatively affect company performance, sometimes halting production for extended periods. Hamilton's analysis further shows that such crises are rarely triggered by a single cause; rather, they accumulate from long-standing grievances over unmet social responsibility obligations, unemployment among community youths, and a general sense of neglect, which eventually erupt into open confrontation when a triggering incident occurs.

Contemporary scholarship reinforces this cumulative view while adding environmental and governance dimensions largely absent from earlier accounts. The United Nations Environment Programme's (2011) assessment of Ogoniland remains a reference point for understanding how prolonged, unremediated environmental damage erodes community trust to the point where confrontation becomes the primary available form of expression. More recent reporting confirms that this pattern persists: the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations' 2023 findings on continued gas flaring in the Niger Delta, and the 2025 confrontation between the Niger Delta Volunteers and Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Company in Akwa Ibom State over unresolved employment and environmental grievances, both illustrate that the structural conditions producing crisis have changed little in over a decade (NAN, 2025; AllAfrica, 2025). Ebisi, Guo, and Soomro (2025) add a further layer by showing that even well-intentioned CSR interventions can themselves become a source of crisis when communities perceive them as superficial, provoking resentment, protest, and, in some cases, sabotage rather than the goodwill they were designed to generate.

What emerges from this body of work is a shared understanding that crisis in oil host communities is best conceptualised as a symptom of accumulated, often unaddressed stakeholder grievance rather than an isolated or random occurrence. This has direct implications for how crisis should be studied: rather than treating each confrontation as a discrete event, researchers and practitioners are increasingly encouraged to trace crises back to their stakeholder origins — who felt excluded, whose expectations were unmet, and whose grievances were left unresolved — since it is this accumulation, rather than the triggering incident itself, that ultimately determines both the severity of a crisis and the difficulty of resolving it.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Stakeholder Theory, propounded by R. Edward Freeman in 1984 in his seminal work Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. Freeman developed the theory as a direct challenge to the then-dominant shareholder primacy model of the firm, which held that management's sole obligation was to maximise returns to shareholders. Freeman argued instead that organisations exist within a web of relationships involving multiple groups (employees, suppliers, customers, communities, government, and financiers) each of whom can affect, or is affected by, the pursuit of organisational objectives, and each of whom therefore holds a legitimate claim on managerial attention (Freeman, 1984). Since its introduction, the theory has evolved considerably: Freeman, Dmytriyev, and Phillips (2021) revisited its foundations to reconcile stakeholder theory with the resource-based view of the firm, arguing that normativity, sustainability, people, and cooperation are dimensions that resource-based strategic thinking cannot afford to ignore, thereby cementing stakeholder theory's continued relevance to contemporary strategic and corporate-community relations scholarship.

The major assumptions underpinning Stakeholder Theory are, first, that organisations are more accurately understood as networks of value-creating relationships than as isolated economic units answerable only to shareholders; second, that stakeholders possess differing degrees of power, legitimacy, and urgency that shape how much managerial attention their claims receive; and third, that long-term organisational value and stability are best achieved not by exploiting stakeholder relationships for short-term gain but by managing them cooperatively and ethically over time (Freeman, Dmytriyev, & Phillips, 2021). The key constructs of the theory include stakeholder identification (determining who counts as a stakeholder), stakeholder salience (assessing the relative power, legitimacy, and urgency of competing stakeholder claims), and stakeholder management (the deliberate strategies an organisation adopts to balance and respond to these claims in its decision-making).

Stakeholder Theory is directly relevant to the present study because it provides the conceptual scaffolding for understanding why crises arise and how they are, or are not, resolved in the relationship between Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited and its host communities. The theory does not merely describe the actors involved in this study; it explains the underlying logic connecting engagement quality, crisis emergence, and the durability of crisis resolution that this research sets out to examine empirically.

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between stakeholder engagement and crisis or conflict management in Nigeria's oil-producing communities, and while they converge on the centrality of trust and inclusive participation, they diverge notably on which remedies are most effective. Oyedele and Stoddart (2026) found that formal environmental governance and participation structures often mask an underlying "agency capture" dynamic in which institutionalised actors such as NGOs and project funders dominate decision-making, leaving grassroots community voices structurally sidelined despite nominal inclusion. Sam and Zibima (2023), who found that a persistent lack of trust and confidence in the drivers of the decision-making process constrained meaningful stakeholder participation, particularly among women and other historically marginalised groups. Both studies converge on the conclusion that the mere existence of engagement structures does not guarantee stakeholder influence; what matters is whether those structures are perceived as genuinely accountable to the communities they claim to serve.

Ekanem, Umoh, and Oyokunyi (2025), however, offer a more optimistic empirical account, finding that innovations in stakeholder engagement and communication strategy measurably mitigated conflict and operational risk while strengthening trust and long-term stakeholder relationships in the oil and gas sector. Akpaka's (2020) qualitative multiple case study of CSR managers in Nigeria's oil industry, which identified multifaceted communication, sustained discussion, and negotiation as the crisis management themes most strongly associated with improved stakeholder engagement and reduced conflict, in contrast to one-off compensation payments that tended to produce only temporary calm. Where Ekanem et al. (2025) and Akpaka (2020) diverge from Oyedele and Stoddart (2026) and Sam and Zibima (2023), however, is in their relatively greater confidence that voluntary, well-designed communication strategies can substantially resolve stakeholder distrust, whereas the latter two studies suggest that structural imbalances in who controls the engagement process may limit how much even well-intentioned dialogue can achieve.

A further point of divergence concerns the role of regulation versus voluntary corporate action. Ebisi, Guo, and Soomro (2025), drawing on qualitative data from communities directly affected by gas flaring and oil spills, found that CSR initiatives perceived as superficial or misaligned with community priorities did not merely fail to prevent conflict but actively provoked resentment, protest, and occasionally sabotage, suggesting that poorly conceived engagement can be actively harmful rather than merely ineffective. Omeoga's (2020) Delphi study of global CSR experts similarly found no clear consensus on what constitutes a successful CSR initiative in the Niger Delta, reinforcing the view that voluntary, company-defined standards of success may not align with community-defined ones.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population consisted of residents of host communities within Sterling Global Oil Resources' Stubb Creek and Uquo Marginal Field (SRCAT) operations in Esit Eket LGA, Akwa Ibom State. Population projections for 2025 are Etebi Idung Akpaisang – 6,780; Etebi Idung Iniang – 7,105; Ikot Afaha Eket – 10,045, totaling an estimated 23,930 residents (NPC, 2006; projected 2.7% annual growth). These communities directly experience the social and operational impacts of the company. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula, a sample size of 393 respondents was obtained, consistent with the sample size on which the study's data were analysed.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire. The instrument was subjected to face validation by an expert in Research Instrumentation, Measurement and Evaluation to ensure the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the items, and its reliability was established using the test–retest method, which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The questionnaire was administered through a combination of face-to-face distribution within the selected communities and electronic sharing via WhatsApp, to maximise reach and response rate. Data were analysed using Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) involving frequency counts and simple percentages, with the findings presented in frequency distribution tables and interpreted descriptively in line with the study's objectives and research questions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 4.1: Dominant Causes and Frequency of Crisis Occurrence

Dominant Cause of Crisis	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Environmental pollution	94	31.3
Employment-related issues	67	22.3
Compensation disputes	72	24.0
Land ownership disputes	26	8.7
CSR/community development issues	35	11.7
Others	6	2.0
Total	**300**	**100**
Frequency of Crisis Occurrence	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Once	32	10.7
Two to three times	109	36.3
Four to six times	98	32.7
More than six times	61	20.3
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of respondents identified environmental pollution (31.3%) as the dominant cause of crisis, while the highest proportion of respondents (36.3%) indicated that crises occurred two to three times.

Table 4.2: Stakeholder Groups Mostly Involved in Crisis Occurrence and Resolution

Stakeholder Group Mostly Involved in Crisis Occurrence	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Community youths	102	34.0
Community leaders	64	21.3
Women's groups	22	7.3
Company management	53	17.7
Government agencies	37	12.3
Security agencies	22	7.3
Total	**300**	**100**
Stakeholder Mostly Involved in Crisis Resolution	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Traditional rulers	81	27.0
Community Development Committee	52	17.3
Youth leaders	48	16.0
Company management	64	21.3
Government officials	39	13.0
Security agencies	16	5.4
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 4.2 shows that the majority of respondents identified community youths (34.0%) as the stakeholder group mostly involved in crisis occurrence, while traditional rulers (27.0%) were identified as the stakeholder group mostly involved in crisis resolution.

Table 4.3: Crisis Management Strategies and Methods of Crisis Resolution

Most Frequently Adopted Strategy	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Dialogue and negotiation	118	39.3
Community meetings	49	16.3
Compensation	53	17.7
CSR projects	39	13.0
Security intervention	29	9.7
Legal action	12	4.0
Total	**300**	**100**
Method of Resolving Crisis	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Dialogue	114	38.0
Mediation	58	19.3
Compensation	51	17.0
Government intervention	38	12.7
Court action	12	4.0
Security enforcement	27	9.0
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 4.3 shows that the majority of respondents identified dialogue and negotiation (39.3%) as the most frequently adopted crisis management strategy, while dialogue (38.0%) was identified as the most common method of resolving crises.

Table 4.4: Effectiveness and Outcomes of Crisis Management Strategies

Most Effective Strategy	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Dialogue and negotiation	126	42.0
Compensation	57	19.0
CSR projects	43	14.3
Government mediation	46	15.3
Security intervention	28	9.4

Total	**300**	**100.0**
Outcome of Crisis Management Strategies	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Complete resolution	64	21.3
Reduction in conflicts	101	33.7
Temporary peace	78	26.0
Improved relationship	43	14.3
No significant improvement	14	4.7
Total	**300**	**100.0**

Overall Effectiveness	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Very effective	72	24.0
Effective	118	39.3
Moderately effective	63	21.0
Slightly effective	29	9.7
Not effective	18	6.0
Total	**300**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 4.4 shows that the majority of respondents identified dialogue and negotiation (42.0%) as the most effective crisis management strategy, reduction in conflicts (33.7%) as the major outcome, and rated the strategies overall as effective (39.3%).

Table 4.5: Challenges, Causes of Recurring Crises and Suggested Measures

Major Challenge	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Poor communication	84	28.0
Lack of trust	69	23.0
Delayed implementation	58	19.3
Inadequate compensation	46	15.3
Political interference	27	9.0
Environmental concerns	16	5.4
Total	**300**	**100.0**
Major Cause of Recurring Crises	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Unfulfilled agreements	87	29.0
Youth unemployment	63	21.0
Environmental degradation	71	23.7
Weak stakeholder cooperation	49	16.3
Poor government involvement	30	10.0
Total	**300**	**100.0**
Response	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Regular dialogue	93	31.0
Prompt implementation	71	23.7
Increased CSR projects	49	16.3
Greater stakeholder participation	46	15.3
Improved communication	29	9.7
Stronger government oversight	12	4.0
Total	**300**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 4.5 shows that the majority of respondents identified poor communication (28.0%) as the major challenge affecting crisis management, unfulfilled agreements (29.0%) as the major cause of recurring crises, and regular dialogue (31.0%) as the most preferred measure for improving crisis management.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

With respect to the first objective, the study found that environmental pollution (31.3%), compensation disputes (24.0%), and employment-related issues (22.3%) were the dominant causes of crisis, occurring most commonly two to three times (36.3%) or four to six times (32.7%). In other words, crisis in the study area is overwhelmingly material rather than symbolic in origin, and it recurs rather than resolving after a single episode. This finding aligns closely with Hamilton's (2011) observation that oil-community crises accumulate from unresolved grievances over social amenities and employment rather than arising from single, spontaneous incidents, and it is further consistent with the United Nations Environment Programme's (2011) documentation of how un-remediated environmental damage sustains community distrust over time. Viewed through Stakeholder Theory, this pattern reflects the urgency dimension of stakeholder salience: environmental and compensation-related claims are time-sensitive and tangible, and when they remain unaddressed, their urgency compounds, making recurrence more, rather than less, likely.

Regarding the second objective, community youths (34.0%) were identified as the stakeholder group most involved in crisis occurrence, while traditional rulers (27.0%) and company management (21.3%) were most credited with resolution, indicating a clear divergence between the stakeholders who trigger conflict and those who are seen to resolve it. This divergence corroborates Oyedele and Stoddart's (2026) finding that formal resolution processes in Niger Delta oil communities tend to be dominated by more institutionalised or traditionally legitimate actors, even where grassroots groups such as youths are the primary bearers of grievance. This is a direct empirical illustration of stakeholder salience under Stakeholder Theory: traditional rulers and company management combine legitimacy and power in ways that youth stakeholders, despite the urgency of their grievances, typically do not, which explains why resolution authority concentrates away from the very group most involved in crisis occurrence.

On the third objective, dialogue and negotiation emerged as the dominant crisis management strategy, both as the most frequently adopted approach (39.3%) and as the most common method of resolving crisis once it occurred (38.0%), well ahead of compensation, security intervention, or legal action. This finding is consistent with Akpaka's (2020) conclusion that multifaceted communication and negotiation processes produce more durable stakeholder engagement than transactional, one-off responses, and with Ekanem et al.'s (2025) finding that proactive communication strategies measurably reduce conflict and operational risk in the oil and gas sector. From a Stakeholder Theory perspective, this preference for dialogue reflects the theory's central proposition that sustainable value and stability arise from managing stakeholder relationships cooperatively rather than unilaterally, a proposition the study area's stakeholders appear to have internalised in practice even without necessarily articulating it in theoretical terms.

With respect to the fourth objective, while dialogue and negotiation was rated the most effective strategy (42.0%) and a majority of respondents rated overall crisis management as effective or very effective (63.3% combined), the most common actual outcome was a reduction in conflicts (33.7%) rather than complete resolution (21.3%), with a further 26.0% describing outcomes as only temporary peace. This gap between perceived strategy effectiveness and actual resolution outcomes echoes Ebisi, Guo, and Soomro's (2025) finding that CSR and engagement efforts perceived as superficial can fail to produce lasting change even when they are not overtly rejected by communities, and it lends support to Egbon, Nwoke, and Agbaitoro's (2024) argument that voluntary, non-binding engagement mechanisms tend to manage rather than resolve underlying conflict. Under Stakeholder Theory, this suggests that while the process of engagement (dialogue) is valued by stakeholders, the absence of enforceable follow-through undermines the theory's normative expectation that stakeholder management should produce durable, mutually beneficial outcomes rather than repeated cycles of temporary accommodation.

On the fifth objective, poor communication (28.0%) and lack of trust (23.0%) were identified as the leading challenges to effective crisis management, while unfulfilled agreements (29.0%) were the leading cause of recurring crises, and respondents' top suggested measures were regular dialogue (31.0%) and prompt implementation of agreements (23.7%). This finding reinforces Sam and Zibima's (2023) conclusion that a lack of trust and confidence in the drivers of engagement processes constrains meaningful stakeholder participation, and it is consistent with Omeoga's (2020) finding that there is no settled consensus, even among experts, on what constitutes successful CSR or crisis management follow-through in the Niger Delta. Interpreted through Stakeholder Theory, these results confirm that stakeholder salience and trust are not static; they must be continuously renewed through consistent follow-through, and where agreements go unfulfilled, both the legitimacy of the responsible stakeholder and the urgency of the underlying grievance are reinforced, setting the stage for the next cycle of crisis.

6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine stakeholders' influence on crisis management between Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited and its host communities in Esit Eket Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings show that crisis in the study area is driven predominantly by tangible, material grievances (environmental pollution, compensation disputes, and unemployment) that recur because they are not fully resolved rather than because they are entirely unaddressed. Community youths are the stakeholder group most associated with the occurrence of crisis, while traditional rulers and company management are most credited with its resolution, reflecting a clear differentiation in stakeholder salience consistent with Stakeholder Theory. Dialogue and negotiation stand out as both the most frequently adopted and the most trusted crisis management strategy, yet the gap between this perceived effectiveness and the more modest reality of “reduction in conflict” or “temporary peace” as the dominant actual outcomes indicates that dialogue alone, without consistent implementation of what is agreed, is insufficient to achieve lasting resolution. Ultimately, the study concludes that sustainable crisis management in this and comparable host communities depends less on introducing new strategies than on strengthening the credibility, inclusiveness, and follow-through of the stakeholder engagement processes already in use.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made in alignment with the study’s objectives:

i. Sterling Global Oil Resources Limited should prioritise verifiable environmental remediation, transparent compensation processes, and local employment schemes as preventive rather than reactive measures.
ii. engagement structures should be deliberately redesigned to give youth representatives a formal, ongoing role in decision-making rather than only a reactive role in protest.
iii. the company and community leadership should institutionalise regular, scheduled dialogue platforms rather than relying on dialogue only after a crisis has already erupted.
iv. all agreements reached through dialogue or compensation should be accompanied by binding timelines and independent monitoring to ensure implementation.
v. the company should establish a transparent, jointly monitored feedback and grievance-tracking mechanism to rebuild and sustain stakeholder trust over time.

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