

# **HABERMAS' DISCOURSE ETHICS AND MATTHEW LIPMAN'S CLASSROOM COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY AS A MODEL OF CONFLICT MITIGATION IN THE NIGER-DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the region that plays host to multinational oil companies has been embroiled in protracted conflicts between the people of the Niger Delta region (the host communities) and the multinational oil companies operating in the region. The conflicts are driven by the interplay of factors which include but not limited to oil exploration and revenue allocation, environmental degradation, unemployment and poverty, exclusion from decision making processes related to oil exploration, forced displacement by oil companies, distortion of the ecological livelihood of the people of the Niger Delta region, and resource control. The prevalence of conflicts in the region has highlighted the need for innovative and cultural effective approaches towards peace building and conflict resolution in the region. Several models, kinetic and non-kinetic aimed at mitigating conflicts in the region and changing the trajectory of relationship between the multinational oil companies and the host communities have been suggested and implemented. However, the contending issues are yet to be satisfactorily resolved as pockets of conflicts and agitations in the region still fester. Jurgen Habermas' Discourse Ethics, and Mathew Lipman's Community of Inquiry are models that seek to explore the effectiveness and possibility of addressing perceived societal dissatisfactions that could trigger conflicts through the engagement of stakeholders (multinational oil companies and people of the Niger Delta region) in constructive and collaborative dialogue. Adopting the qualitative design and methods of textual analysis, speculation and hermeneutics, this essay affirms a nexus between Habermas's and Lipman's models, and conflict resolution in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It argues that insecurity and conflicts in the region can be mitigated if models that prioritizes inclusiveness, dialogue and collaborative inquiry which the two thinkers envisioned are adopted. The essay in conclusion posits that relief interventions and empowerment programmes should be based on the occupational demography of the people of the region where those with similar occupation are stratified and profiled.

**Keywords:** Discourse Ethics, Community of Inquiry, Niger-Delta region, Multinational Oil Companies, Conflict Resolution.

## **Introduction**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the region that produces about ninety percent of the wealth of the nation, has, overtime, been embroiled in incessant conflicts, restiveness, hostage taking, militancy, pipeline vandalization, kidnaping, and other shades of insurgencies. The reason for these crisis which have, to an extent, bedeviled the socio-economic activities of the region is attributed to tensions between the multinational oil

companies operating in the region and the host communities who suffer environmental degradation, extinction of their ecological livelihood, marginalization, poverty, and under-development. There have been several efforts, kinetic and non-kinetic, aimed at mitigating conflicts in the region to guarantee industrial harmony and sustainable peace and development. This essay, which seeks to apply Jurgen Habermas' Discourse ethics, and Matthew Lipman's Community of Inquiry as models of mitigating conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is one of such efforts.

To facilitate our discourse, this essay shall proceed in five prongs. It will begin by traversing Habermas Discourse ethics, to ascertain how his notion of valid norms as a product of collaborative dialogue and discussion by concern parties and stakeholders can engender conflict mitigation in the region. It shall also peruse Lipman's Community of Inquiry, a pedagogical space where stakeholders gather under the ambience of tolerance, equality and respect of the views of members and working as a group learn to see themselves as active participants in the discovery, analysis, and justification of claims to knowledge. Also, the essay shall examine conflicts and their causes in the Niger Delta region. Furthermore, attempt shall be made to apply Jurgen Habermas's and Matthew Lipman's models to the mitigation of conflicts in the region; and finally, the evaluation and conclusion.

### **Jürgen Habermas' Discourse Ethics**

Jurgen Habermas is a renowned German philosopher and sociologist best known for his works on communicative action, deliberative democracy, and the public sphere. Habermas like Immanuel Kant, is committed to moral universalism, cognitivism, impartiality and equality. However, in contrast to Kant, Habermas, defends a public and proceduralist model of justification, arguing that the justification for a moral norm requires that the norm be assented to by participants in a moral discourse (Mahoney, 2002, p. 300). Habermas's thought is evidenced by his dogged commitment to the claim that the validity of moral norms is contingent upon the outcome of a real moral discourse that could occur under the right conditions. The claim that moral theory in the modern world must eschew the aim of providing an apriori justification for norms, fallibilism, the need for a post-metaphysical approach to normative theory, and the claim that a norm is valid only if those to whom it applies can agree to its acceptance as a general rule motivates his commitment to discourse ethics. The traditional idea of objectivity in Habermas' view is replaced by commitment to finding objectivity in dialogue and consensus, denying the possibility of achieving moral objectivity through self-reflection on the grounds that justification requires the mutual consent of all affected persons. It is germane to stress that Habermas's thought is influenced by his notion of the human person. He sees humans as reflective beings endowed with the capacity to judge and act morally, when they understand themselves as autonomous persons with equal dignity. As a community of moral beings, humanity creates laws to regulate matters requiring norms and do so in terms of rights and duties. Members of such a community address one another intersubjectively, placing one another under obligation with the expectation of conformity to such norms (Mckenna 2024).

Moral behaviour, in Habermas's view, then, seems to be a constructive response to human being's social environment, in which they are dependent on others for help, care, and respect, and where they are vulnerable in body and as individuals. His discourse ethics is a moral framework that emphasizes the imperative of democratic deliberation and discursive approach to moral norms, the goal being to reach a consensus which can foster cooperation and mutual understanding. The individual subject, according to Habermas, is

“unfinished” at birth, emerging through socialization within the linguistic community. Only when integrated into relations of mutual respect can human beings emerge as individuals and maintain their personal identity. Habermas sees the human person as possessor of rational capabilities amenable to critical thinking and reflection. Humans, though fallible beings, are also communicative beings driven to understand and cooperate with others while language plays a pivotal role in shaping human thoughts, interaction and understanding. As social creatures shaped by interaction, mutual recognition and collective identity, humans have the capacity for cooperative inquiry about issues that bothers them (Mckenna, 2024, p. 13). Habermas considers acting persons as subjects who speak and listen, who are connected by some relationships with the “objective, social or subjective world,” and at the same time put forward encroachments on the significance of what they talk about, think, and what they are sure of. Therefore, the relationship of individual subject to the world is always mediated and relativized by the possibilities of communication with other people, as well as their disputes and the ability to come to an agreement (Tytar, *et al.*, 2002, p. 5). In Habermas’ discourse ethics, there is a paradigm shift from a subject centered to a communicative or discourse centred conception of morality. The conception of moral justification that Habermas defends is supposed to show that agents must consult those with whom they interact before making a moral judgment. He succinctly encapsulates:

In order for a moral consensus to qualify as valid, it must be rationally motivated, where rationally motivated means the agreed upon norms satisfy the discourse principle...a moral consensus is valid only if all affected had the opportunity to participate, and if the outcome of the discourse does not erode any participants standing as an equal member of the community (Mahoney, 2002, 301).

For Habermas, what is stated above implies that agents who defend moral claim are appealing to shared moral point of view, and also that when agents appeal to a shared moral point of view, they cannot but make themselves accountable to others who also adopt this point of view. Amids discourse, the mutual accountability required to justify a norm can be satisfied if a principle of deliberative inclusion is met, that realizes that moral ideals of respect and equality are understood to be substantive rather than procedural norms. To achieve an authentic discourse, Habermas, according to Okshevsky (2004: 178), enumerates the features and conditions of authentic discourse as follows:

- i. Nobody who could make a relevant contribution may be excluded. All competent speakers and actors are permitted to take part in discourse. Practical discourse are public in nature.
- ii. All participants are granted an equal opportunity to make contributions. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever, to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse and to express his attitudes, desires and needs. The equal communicative rights of all participants ensures that only reasons that give equal weight to the interests and evaluative orientations of everybody can influence the outcome of practical discourse.
- iii. Participants must mean what they say
- iv. Communication must be free from external and internal coercion so that the “yes” or “no” stances that participants adopt on criticizable validity claims are motivated solely by the rational force of the better reason.

Habermas advocated for a deliberative democracy where citizens participate in public debate and decision making process. He also emphasized the importance of a public sphere, a domain of social life where public opinions can be formed, where citizens gather to discuss and debate matters of common concern. By emphasizing the importance of public discourse, Habermas challenged traditional notion of representative democracy and highlights the need for more direct and participatory forms of citizenship (Baxter, 2002). Congruent with his notion of democracy which is rooted in his concept of public sphere and communicative action, he believes that democracy thrives when citizens engage in open, inclusive, rational discourse which should be free from coercion, domination and manipulation, allowing all voices to be heard. He advocates for a domain of social life where public opinions can be formed, where citizens gather to issues that bother them. A view similar to Habermas' thought catalogued above is that of Matthew Lipman's Classroom Community of Inquiry which this work shall examine in the next section.

### **Matthew Lipman's Classroom Community of Inquiry**

Matthew Lipman was an American philosopher and educator who developed Philosophy for Children, which aimed to encourage critical thinking, creativity, inquiry, and reasonableness in children. Lipman maintains that a democratic change can occur in schools if it is committed to a balanced development of all aspects of thinking. Lipman considers philosophy as a playful and communicative activity in which ideas are built on other ideas as an increasing movement. He calls the forum of philosophizing "the Community of Inquiry". By this, he means:

A pedagogical space in which children listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions (2003, p.101-102).

The classroom Community of Inquiry of Lipman is characterized by non-adversarial deliberations, shared cognitions, respect and tolerance of the views of members. The features of Lipman's classroom community of inquiry are:

- i. **Inclusiveness:** The participants may or may not be of one religion, nationality or age level, but within a community, no one is excluded from internal activities without adequate justification.
- ii. **Impartiality:** Matters are investigated in an atmosphere that takes into account all the considerations and points of view of members: the voices of everyone is respected without recourse to gender, religion, race, social status or tribal affiliations.
- iii. **Respect of the Views of Members:** Members' points of view are accommodated and tolerated.
- iv. **Shared Cognition:** In prolonged session of private reflection, all individuals will engage in a series of mental acts aimed at penetrating and analyzing the matter at hand. Thus, one will engage in wondering, questioning, inferring, defining, assuming, supposing, imagining, distinguishing, and so on. In shared cognition, the same acts are engaged in, but by different members of the community. One person raises a question, another objects to an underlying assumption, still another offers a counter instance. The intellectual distance traversed may be the same, but the second illustration demonstrates how they can be a thinking community.

- v. **Deliberation:** This involves a consideration of alternatives through examination of the reasons supporting each alternative. Since the deliberation usually takes place in preparation for the making of a judgment, we speak of the process as a “weighing” of the reasons and the alternatives.
- vi. **Reasonableness:** To be reasonable indicates that one has the capacity to employ rational procedures in a judicious manner, it signifies one’s capacity to listen to or be open to reason. Both senses of the term are fundamental for the community of inquirers.
- v. **Challenge as a Procedure:** When children argue among themselves, it is not uncommon for them to challenge one another, sometimes quite intensely, they demand to know the reason supporting this judgment, or the meaning of this expression. The community of inquiry experience teaches them that challenging is good but it need not be heated. It is just one more cognitive procedure that the participants need to perform in the course of their inquiries.
- vi. **The Discussion:** The discussion often begins by turning to the person who posed the question that the community decides should be discussed first. The student may be asked to say a few words about the sources of the question or concern raised, the reason for raising it, and why it should be up for consideration. With the student’s reply, others join in so as to articulate their agreement or disagreement with the issues under consideration. In all possibility, more than one line of reasoning will open up, as the reading and questioning have stimulated a variety of interests among members of community of inquiry (Lipman, 2003, p.95-98).

### **Seating Arrangement in the Classroom Community of Inquiry**

In Matthew Lipman’s Classroom Community of Inquiry, seats are arranged in semicircular form with students seated in a circle of chairs, face to face with the classmates and the teacher who act as a class captain. The arrangement is designed to breach perceived designated space or reservation for teacher who sits on high table dictating pace of the deliberation and dishing out commands and instructions to be obeyed by students. The semi-circle seating arrangement formation in the classroom is designed to eliminate the front and back set up where the teacher stands at the fronts and students sit in rows facing him, such seating formation eliminates hierarchical structure where one person is at the head of the table thus promoting sense of equality among the participants, promoting inclusivity and active listening. They are also able to work together to explore issues, share perspectives, and find solutions. The circular arrangement encourages dialogue, as students can easily make eye-contact with the teacher and respond to each other as equal. Circular seating arrangement also help reduce dominance, obliterating distinctions which pave way for more egalitarianism, increased empathy and support for diverse perspectives. Suffice it to state that, Lipman’s thought is underpinned by his concept of human nature. Lipman believes that humans are naturally inquisitive and curious beings with the propensity for collaborative inquiry. Humans, he believes, also possess the capacity to think critically and caringly in a group. This informs his model of community of inquiry which highlights the premium laid by him on collaborative discussions in an atmosphere of tolerance empathy and respects of the views and perspectives of other members.

### **Conflicts in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria**

Conflict, according to Wilson (1997, p. 163), connotes a situation which may result in controversy, struggle, strive or contention; and in consequence, brings about an uncertainty within self or bring about a state of incompatibility between human; and then crisis within society. As a social necessity and a normal functional inevitable aspect of a healthy society, Francis (2000), sees conflict as an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence and defines it as “the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups”, which could be a state of antagonistic and adversarial relationship. Therefore, dialogue is needed to bridge the gap and bring the parties into a cooperative relationship. Conflict is a basic fact of life and an inevitable feature of organizational and societal life. For Galtung (2022), conflict is parties shocking together. An inner shock that may cause hatred and that may be expressed in violence due to incompatibility of goals. Conflict can be intrapersonal, interpersonal, communal, regional, institutionalized, global, organizational, endogenous and so on. It does not just occur. Certain conditions give rise to conflict, which Wilson (1997) lists to include:

- i. Lack of information and misinformation
- ii. Incompatibility of goals
- iii. Differences in perception, unacceptable or ineffective methods of handling matters or issues, previously mismanaged conflicts, interdependence, scarce resources, lack of opportunity, ability or motivation to communicate effectively. Conflict begets reconciliation and no one can reconcile if there is no conflict or even war.

Nigeria has six geopolitical regions, South East, South West, North East, North West, North Central and South South. All these regions are blessed with abundance of natural resources. Natural resources constitute “any material from nature having potential economic value or providing for the sustenance of life, such as timber, minerals, crude oil, water and wildlife (Onuoha: 2020, p 28-40). Natural resources embedded in the land are at the centre of much of Nigeria’s legal and political landscape. They energize power politics and various form of antagonism which stems from the way and manner of who gets what, when and how. National resources’ conflicts bring tension and instability since they affect social and economic life of the host communities within the affected states.

The Niger Delta Region, which is in the south South Geo-political region of Nigeria, comprises of the States of Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Imo, Abia, Akwa Ibom and Cross River and is endowed with abundance of crude oil and other mineral resources. The major cause of conflict in the Niger-Delta region is what Yinka in Ezirigwe (2017) referred to as “resource curse”, a situation referred to by economists as a scenario where a country rich in natural resources is full of very poor people. The Niger Delta region is a densely populated area in Nigeria. Its boundaries, as defined by the Nigerian government, extend over about 70,000km, and it makes up 7.5% of Nigeria’s land mass. It is the area that stretches in an East-West direction and extends from South West Cameroon to the Okitipupa ridge, forming an apex at the South East of the River Niger and Benue confluences (Asaktikpi and Oyelaran 1999; as cited in Amodu 2007). The Niger Deltans have settled in the area for several millennia and consists of mostly agrarian communities before the 15th century and their communities produced commodities such as oil palm, rubber, sugarcane, and fruit like mango, banana, and pawpaw. They also engage in fishing, farming, handicraft, and trading. In 1956, crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity at Oloibiri in Bayelsa State in the Niger; Delta though it did not assume a significant position in Nigeria’s economic index until

the post-colonial period. Following the discovery, multinational oil companies began exploring for oil in the Niger-Delta region, which culminated in the growth of Nigeria's oil production with the country becoming a major oil producer and exporter. Nigeria's oil fortune is not without a price; as Amodu (2007), observes that tapping into oil reserves requires the construction of rigs, industrial facilities, and power plants. It also involves the process of prospecting, exploring and drilling crude oil. He stated that all these culminate in the degradation and destruction of life supporting ecological systems and other natural resources. Apart from the destruction of vegetation during the exploration and production, the flaring of associated gasses in the process of extracting the crude oil poses a threat to human lives. Unburned carbon, according to Amodu (2007, p. 105), is often transported into the homes and working area of the Niger-Delta inhabitants.

Also, whenever it rains, thick sooths are washed off from roofs and other surfaces causing the black-like water, which is believed to contain harmful chemicals, which affect the fertility of the soil. Oil spills and other pollutants have contaminated the region's water sources, leading to the spread of water borne diseases. Respiratory complications experienced by the people of the region is occasioned by toxic chemical emissions released into the air and exposure to such pollutants may cause cancer, birth defects, and other diseases. Oil exploration and production have led to displacement of communities, as their arable land and fishing creeks are taken over by Multinational Oil companies. The destruction of the region's environment have led to loss of livelihood and the extinction of the aquatic lives of the people of the region. Fishermen and farmers can no longer pursue their traditional occupations without strategies in place to assuage their concerns and losses. The above is sufficient to stoke restiveness and conflict by the host communities; as African life, according to Njoku (2002), is therefore neither purely bodily nor purely spiritual, but a life of the whole man, the whole life, the entire being in its totality, which include inheritance, family, land, with all its endowment, water, river, lakes, ocean and forest. Being deprived of their resources in a potential cause of conflicts, Amodu laments that the area which is responsible for Nigeria's oil wealth is one of the most backward, in terms of development. Communities in the region lack basic infrastructures such as good roads, pipe-borne water, hospitals, schools, electricity, etc. Further decrying the situation in the Niger-Delta region, Idemudia and Osaghae, lament that:

around 40 million litres of oil spill annually cause widespread contamination of the air, land, and water. The crucial mangrove swamps have been severely affected, with large areas destroyed or at risk due to pollution from oil spills and gas flaring. The waterways are often contaminated by hydrocarbons, negatively affecting fish populations and water quality. Local farmers are reporting significant decline in crop yields, with yam and cassava harvest shrinking due to soil contamination with crude oil. ...the health implications for residents are dire, life expectancy plummeting to around 45 years with increased incidence of diseases such as cancer, kidney damage, diabetes, and neurological disorders linked to heavy metals polluted environment causing heightened poverty in the region (2001, p. 1006-1015).

The above exposition on the dire situations in the region predispose the host communities to restiveness, militancy, pipeline vandalism, and indiscriminate hostage taking and kidnappings in view of perceived injustice, neglect and marginalization. Incessant conflicts,

restiveness, and the agitation for the development of the Niger-Delta region, the goose that lays the golden eggs, stem from the fact that in spite of the regions resource endowments, with its immense potentials for economic growth and sustainable development, the region has remained increasingly under threat from rapidly deteriorating and compromised environmental conditions as well as social tensions which the past and present governments' policies have not addressed (Sufyan, 2012, p. 40). For Osagie et al. (2010), non deployment of revenues accrued from oil found in the Niger Delta region to the development and empowerment of their communities also accounts for persistent conflicts and restiveness in the region.

The evident violence in the Niger-Delta region is what Onua cited in Amodu (2007) describes as a sort of revenge mission on both the government and multinational oil companies. On one hand, the government is blamed for the neglect of the area while it uses the resources derived from there to develop other regions of the country; and on the other hand, the oil companies are accused of not doing enough to develop the communities from which they make their money. Since oil exploration processes engender degradation of the environment, the indigenes of the Niger-Delta argue that they are entitled to compensation, empowerment and development of their communities; hence, there have emerged several militant groups who probably feel that by fighting for their rights, they can bring succour for their people. Addressing these challenges require a multifaceted approach that involve government, oil companies, and local communities. Some potential remedies include but not limited to kinetic approaches like deployment of state actors to suppress restiveness and insurgencies in the area, and non kinetic measures like symposiums, workshops and seminars aimed at engaging with the stakeholders on the need for peace and conflict resolution. These seem not to abate the agitations as incessant crises that often disrupt the operations of the multinational companies and restiveness in the region still fester. In the section that follows, attempts shall be made to examine Matthew Lipman's model of Community of Inquiry, and Jurgen Habermas's Discourse Ethics as a model of mitigating conflicts in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

### **Applying Jurgen Habermas's Discourse Ethics and Matthew Lipman's Community of Inquiry as a Model for Mitigating Conflicts in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria**

The purpose of Jurgen Habermas' Discourse Ethics and Matthew Lipman's Community of Inquiry is to explore the effectiveness and possibility of addressing perceived societal dissatisfaction that may trigger conflict through the engagement of stakeholders in constructive dialogue in an ambience of respect and tolerance of their views. Under such a circumstance, the concerns, grouses and agitations of the host communities are collectively traversed with a view to articulating workable solutions that could address perceived injustices and grievances. Habermas discourse ethics seems a veritable model for mitigating conflicts in the Niger Delta region by envisioning inclusive, democratic, and participatory decision making processes. His discourse ethics attempts a reconstruction of necessary epistemic conditions or presupposition of argumentations with the aim of identifying the common epistemic grounds that all rational speakers and actors must and do accept in performatively engaging in the activity of giving and assessing reasons aim at resolving disagreements or conflicts through dialogical means rather than through aggression (Okshevshy: 2004, p.174). Engaging host communities in constructive dialogue and decision making is imperative for Multinational Companies operating in the Niger-Delta region to seek solutions to prevent conflict, promote sustainable development, and ensure the



wellbeing of the host communities. It can also foster social cohesion, trust and sense of belonging by the host communities. Valid norm, according to Habermas, is a product of consensus by the community of discourse. Consequently, this essay seeks a redifination of conflict mitigation model in addressing the agitations of the region by creating a platform and providing a forum for inclusive, participatory dialogue where the grievances of the host communities are accommodated and examined to ascertain the degree of injustice, environmental degradation, economic marginalization and losses suffered by them as a result of the operations of the Multinational oil companies. Habermas's Discourse Ethics and Matthew Lipman's Community of Inquiry, envisioned such a platform.

Habermas has enumerated pragmatic necessities for discourse, what include non exclusion of persons who are willing to take part in the discourse, according a participant equal opportunity to make contributions, and deliberations free from external coercion. In such context, the representatives of Governments and Multinational Oil Companies in meeting with the host communities, need to act as neutral partners, navigating the countours of grievances and agitations tabled by them. Such concerns and agitations should be attended to, intrinsically, without recourse to any existential consideration of a speaker's socio-economic status, gender, political lineage, religion or occupation. For people to be treated fairly, and in cognizance of the variegated occupations of people of the host communities; fishermen, farmers, artisans, carpenters and so on, this essay suggests occupational demography and profiling to ascertain their different occupational mix. This is germane for ease of capturing of specific challenges and losses suffered by different professional groups. This approach can provide a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of multinational oil companies activities on the various occupational groups. Occupational profiling fosters targeted interventions that may address the specific needs and losses suffered by each professional group, provide accurate data on the impacts of multinational companies' activities, ensure that relief intervention are relevant to specific challenges faced by each occupational groups, and increase participation and buy-in from each trade groups in policy formulations. Though this suggestion seems demanding and tiresome, however, it is worthwhile as such concerns cannot be equated with losses suffered in a rancorous oi exploration climate. If oil wells are shut-down and production interrupted, losses of revenues arising therefrom cannot be quantified.

By so engaging with the host communities according to different trade and occupational groups which this essay suggests, the fishermen who are impacted by oil spillage may, after the discourse, be found to be in immediate need of fishing nets and other fishing gears destroyed by oil spills, in addition to food and beverages, mattresses and blankets which though a laudable relieve intervention may not achieve a long term respite. Farmers would need improved seedlings and fertilizer for improved yields given their compromised soil fertility occasioned by oil exploration in addition to consumables, and mattresses. A carpenter who builds canoes and petty traders who sell wares may be in immediate need of capital to boost their businesses in addition to mattresses and food items as relief materials. Unemployed youths may be in immediate need of employment even as contract staff in the oil companies while some of them may need scholarships to further their education, or interest free facilities to become entrepreneurs. All these may be ascertained during inclusive dialogue which Habermas advocates. Matthew Lipman also developed a model of conflict resolution which can be replicated in the Niger-Delta region to mitigate conflict. Rooted in his Community of Inquiry approach earlier explained, Lipman premised his conflict resolution model in collaborative interrogation of issues or problematic

situations that seem to elicit conflict, in a round table conversation in an atmosphere where the views of discussant are tolerated, respected and prioritized without recourse to sex, race, social status, religious background, or political affiliation. A space where stakeholders can gather to discuss freely with the aim of finding workable solutions to what confronts them. Lipman believes that engaging in critical, caring and creative thinking by both the multinational companies and the host communities could promote reasoned discussion rather than emotional reactions.

If dialogue in the Community of Inquiry is conducted in an atmosphere of justice, fairness and empathy, reasoned solution may be achievable. Consistent with Lipman's Community of Inquiry, the gathering will be that of equality where all variants of distinctions are obliterated. Consequently, fishermen, farmers, artisans, carpenters and welders will freely congregate with the representatives of government and multi natural companies. The next step will be laying bare their grievances whereby each occupational group will table the degree of impacts they suffer and how the activities of oil companies have affected their livelihoods and the nature of intervention needed. Everyone being accorded importance, respect and equal opportunity to speak. The present socio-economic and environmental condition of the host communities could be likened to what John Dewey (1991) refers to as problematic, disturbed or confusing situation, felt difficulty, and an indeterminate situation. To assuage the situation, government and multinational oil conglomerate must explore avenues of confronting the maladies to make the region receptive rather than restive for the host communities and oil conglomerates. Applying Lipman's model of Community of Inquiry when stakeholders (Host Communities and Oil Companies) come together for dialogue, it is not uncommon for them while putting across their grievances to challenge one another, demanding to know the reason for a position taken or what lies behind a certain point of view, such deliberations often involve them in a consideration of certain point of views through examination of the reasons supporting each alternative. Anih (2007), opines that such engagements often culminate in settlements that take into account all the considerations and points of view, as well as interests of everyone. However, this is not to suggest that it is possible to satisfy everyone's interest.

In Lipman's Community of Inquiry model, children and their teacher, sit in a semicircular form to be able to speak face to face with one another. A student reads the assigned episode aloud, when the reading is completed, the teacher recruit questions, asking other class members such questions as "Did anything in the reading puzzled you?" "Did this episode make you wonder?", "Can you put your feelings in the form of questions?". The teacher then writes each child's questions on the board, adding to it that child's name, as well as the page and line number in the text that is at issue (Anih: 2007, p.176). What can be gleaned from Lipman's Community of Inquiry is direct interface with the learners where issues and dilemmas provoked by the text read are collectively engaged with by the stakeholders, teachers and students not by a proxy or representative. Replicating Lipman's model to mitigate Niger-Delta conflict, the locals, members of the host communities, represent the learners and the representatives of Multinational Oil Companies represent the teacher. They are seated in a circle form at a venue mutually agreed upon and accessible to both parties. The reading of the text represents the various groups agitations, and concerns raised by the communities who suffer degradation. The concerns of the locals are to be accommodated and waded into and no one, irrespective of social status, gender or family lineage, is to be excluded or disdained from making contributions and suggestions of possible interventions needed to address their grievances. The multinational company may

present the versions of their interventions as a corporate social responsibility which may be collaboratively discussed by both parties till near compromise reached. These face to face interaction may go a long way in assuaging tensions and inferiority complex by the people of the Niger Delta region, paving way for peaceful resolution of perceived conflict. Also, the sitting arrangement which makes no provision for high table or reservation for a leader is sufficient to elicit meaningful engagement as participants see themselves as equals. Such is in contradiction with foras where designated spaces are reserved for speakers and dignitaries to gather for discussion of Niger-Delta conflict. The sitting arrangement is sufficient to trigger tension, fear and feeling of inferiority as the peasant farmer and local fishermen may feel inferior to air their views. Arising from the forgoing, both Jurgen Habermas and Matthew Lipman envisioned an atmosphere of collaborative dialogue where grievances are address in a manner amendable to equal participation and respect of the views of stakeholders.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

Jurgen Habermas' Discourse ethics and Matthew Lipman's Classroom Community of Inquiry offer valuable framework for conflict mitigation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, a region plagued by socio-economic and environmental tensions arising from oil exploration activities of the Multinational Oil Companies. Habermas' Discourse Ethics envisioned communication, inclusivity and consensus-building through constructive engagement and dialogue. The core idea is that stakeholders engage in fair and open dialogue in an ambience that fosters freedom, tolerance, empathy and respect of views of all without recourse to socio-economic status, religious and tribal affiliation or gender. All stakeholders, government officials, oil conglomerates and host communities participate equally in deliberations about perceived environmental injustices, extinction of aquatic livelihood, environmental degradation, marginalization and historical injustices in a round table model of discussion which obliterate distinction and pave way for equal participation of members. The establishment of such space where the Multinational Oil Companies and host communities regularly interrogate issues, guided by principles of tolerance, mutual respect and shared reasonings, aligns with Habermas' postulates.

Congruent with Habermas' line of thoughts is Matthew Lipman's Community of Inquiry which emphasizes critical thinking, collaborative dialogue and constructive engagements. Creating spaces for dialogue where stakeholders (Multinational oil companies and host Communities) can gather as equals to reflect on their assumptions and biases can help reduce existential tensions, reduce misunderstandings and foster trust among conflicting parties. Through the integration of Habermas' and Lipman's paradigms, aggrieved voices could be heard and engaged in problem solving. The emphasis on consensus and critical reflection can help rebuild trust between the government, multinational companies, and host communities. However, it is our view here engagements by government and multinational companies need to be deepened to take cognizance of different occupations and trades demography of the host communities, in order to address their specific needs and concerns. Such engagements would address specific challenges rather than interventions and programmes which are at variance with the immediate needs of the aggrieved communities, such intervention not being a product of collaborative dialogue which Habermas and Lipman envisions. It is the view here, that government should engage the host communities after profiling of the different trade groups, farmers, fishermen, artisans, traders, youths and women. Ignoring the needs and agitations of the host communities can exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts in the region.

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