

# Community Participation for Environmental Conservation and Policy Advocacy in the Niger Delta

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## ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria faces severe environmental challenges due to extensive oil exploration, pollution, and resource exploitation, which have adversely impacted local ecosystems and communities. This article explores the critical role of community participation in advancing environmental conservation and policy advocacy in the Niger Delta. It highlights how community engagement contributes to sustainable resource management, influences environmental policies, and fosters collaborative efforts among stakeholders. Thorough analysis of recent Nigerian case studies, the article examines successful community-driven initiatives, identifies challenges such as limited capacity, exclusion, and institutional constraints, and discusses strategies to strengthen community involvement. Key recommendations include capacity-building, transparency, multi-stakeholder collaboration, policy reforms, and enhanced funding for grassroots initiatives. The study underscores that empowering local communities is essential for achieving long-lasting environmental sustainability and equitable development in the Niger Delta.

**Keywords:** Community participation, Environmental conservation, Policy advocacy, Niger Delta, Sustainable development, Capacity-building, Stakeholder collaboration

## INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is recognised as one of Africa's most ecologically and culturally rich areas, blessed with extensive oil and gas reserves that have significantly bolstered Nigeria's economy since crude oil was first discovered commercially in Oloibiri (present-day Bayelsa State) in 1956. However, decades of oil extraction and exploration have resulted in the severe degradation of the region, evidenced by widespread environmental pollution, loss of biodiversity, and negative health effects on local populations. The delicate ecosystem has been disrupted by oil spills, gas flaring, and unregulated industrial activities, threatening the livelihoods and well-being of millions who rely on the waterways and land for survival.

This environmental crisis highlights the urgent requirement for sustainable conservation plans that not only focus on ecological restoration but also empower local communities to act as effective agents of change. Community participation has become a crucial method for both environmental policy advocacy and conservation efforts in the Niger Delta. Unlike interventions imposed from the top-down, which frequently fail to account for local realities and indigenous knowledge, community-driven initiatives leverage local ownership, social networks, and indigenous wisdom to achieve more sustainable and effective environmental outcomes.

Involving local populations in efforts such as monitoring environmental degradation, pushing for stricter regulations, and executing restoration projects guarantees that conservation measures are consistent with the socio-economic requirements of the people directly affected. Moreover, participatory approaches increase the accountability of oil companies and governments, thereby promoting responsiveness to environmental concerns and enhancing transparency. Recent academic work in Nigeria emphasises the vital importance of community involvement in confronting the environmental problems of the Niger Delta. For example, Okoye and Eze (2023) demonstrate how grassroots organisations have successfully mobilised local populations to demand remediation of oil spill sites and influence necessary policy reforms, illustrating the capacity of collective action in environmental governance. Similarly, Adetunji et al. (2022) document community-managed environmental

monitoring programmes. These programmes have improved the collection of data regarding pollution incidents, which enables quicker responses and fosters collaboration among stakeholders. These findings affirm the indispensable role that community participation plays, not only in conservation efforts but also in formulating policies that prioritise social justice and ecological integrity.

### **Background of Environmental Challenges in the Niger Delta**

The Niger Delta, which serves as Nigeria's main area for oil production, is grappling with significant environmental deterioration stemming from decades of continuous oil extraction and exploration. This region, known for its extensive biodiversity and cultural importance, has been severely affected by numerous ecological problems, such as oil spills, the burning of natural gas (gas flaring), habitat destruction (deforestation), contamination of water sources, and the decline of species (biodiversity loss). A number of these difficulties were pointed out by Adekola, Fischbacher-Smith, Fischbacher-Smith, and Adekola (2017).

In the Niger Delta, the leakage of crude oil presents a major environmental worry. Within the last fifty years, countless spills have occurred in the area, resulting in the discharge of an estimated 9 to 13 million barrels of unrefined oil into the ecosystem. Such spills have ruined mangrove woodlands, contaminated waterways and streams, and made supplies of drinking water hazardous. Lindén and Pålsson (2013) noted that in Ogoniland, for instance, levels of benzene detected in potable water exceeded World Health Organisation standards by more than 900 times, creating serious health dangers for residents.

Gas flaring, which involves igniting the natural gas produced during oil recovery, constitutes another critical ecological problem. Nigeria is in the top nine of burning off gas like Russia, Iran and Iraq That are ranked higher in total volume globally, with roughly 2.37 billion cubic feet being flared every day (Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission, 2025). This activity releases enormous amounts of methane and other toxic vapours into the air, thus contributing to global climate change and worsening the quality of air locally. Furthermore, the ongoing flaring exposes surrounding populations to constant noise and illumination pollution, negatively impacting their well-being and standard of living.

The abundant life forms of the Niger Delta are endangered because of widespread tree loss (deforestation) and the destruction of natural habitats. Mangrove forests, which are vital for defending the coast and acting as spawning sites for diverse life, have disappeared because of illicit refining operations and oil spills. Angaye and Lelei (2025) reported that from 2007 to 2017, about 12% of the mangrove expanse in this area vanished. This habitat loss, combined with environmental contamination, has caused a reduction in many plant and animal populations, disturbing the region's ecological stability and hurting the ways of life for those communities relying on these natural assets.

The deterioration of the environment in the Niger Delta directly impacts the health of its residents. Contact with polluted air and water has been associated with diverse medical conditions, such as breathing difficulties, dermal ailments, and malignancies. Furthermore, the poisoning of consumed items, like agricultural produce and fish, intensifies food insecurity and poor nutrition in the area. Research indicated that crude oil leaks diminished the nutritional value of cassava and vegetables, resulting in higher occurrences of childhood malnutrition.

The environmental difficulties also carry substantial socio-economic consequences. Pollution has seriously harmed fishing and farming, which are the main sources of income for a large portion of the people, which resulted in lower output from agriculture, driving many communities into poverty. Despite the immense riches generated by oil in the region, local inhabitants have gained minimal economic advantage, fuelling extensive dissatisfaction and civil disturbance.

The ecological problems facing the Niger Delta are complex and originated from many decades of industrial operations. Solving these issues demands holistic approaches, encompassing the cleanup of the environment, methods for sustainable growth, and meaningful involvement from the local populace. Restoring the ecological equilibrium and enhancing the quality of life for residents can only be achieved through coordinated endeavours.

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## Community Participation: Definition, Role, and Impact in Environmental management

Community participation has to do with the ability of individuals, old or young, rich or poor, to have an input into the decision-making process and play a vital role in improving the quality of life in the environment. It is the active involvement of local people in decision-making processes, particularly those concerning their environment and means of survival (Oyebamiji & Adekola 2008). In the context of the Niger Delta, this includes community engagement in environmental conservation initiatives, policy lobbying, and the management of natural resources. This involvement guarantees that the concerns of the most affected by environmental degradation are acknowledged during the development and execution of policies and projects.

### Forms of Community Participation

Community participation takes four main forms which includes:

1. **Consultative Engagement:** This type of engagement involves seeking community input through methods such as focus group discussions, surveys, and public consultations. For example, the Socio-economic Baseline Study for Ogoniland gathered community opinions on environmental challenges and needs for restoration by utilising focus group discussions with groups including chiefs, youth, and women (UNEP, 2011).
2. **Collaborative Decision-Making:** In this approach, communities participate jointly in decision-making and planning processes with NGOs and government agencies. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) frequently works together with local communities to implement and design development projects, guaranteeing that the resulting interventions correspond to community priorities and needs.
3. **Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation:** This involves communities actively participating in assessing the effectiveness of interventions and monitoring environmental conditions. A prime illustration of this method is the establishment of Community Monitoring and Advocacy Groups (CMAGs) in Bayelsa State, where local organisations evaluate how development projects are implemented and hold relevant stakeholders accountable (Spaces for Change, 2020).
4. **Advocacy and Mobilisation:** This form involves communities organising advocacy efforts and campaigns aimed at influencing policy decisions and demanding accountability from corporate entities and the government. Notable instances of mobilisation at the grassroots level include the campaigns organised by the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) against oil spills and gas flaring in the Niger Delta (IYC, 2019).

### Levels of Community Participation

Community engagement operates at three main levels which are:

1. **Local Level:** Participation is direct and immediate at this tier, involving community members in local decision-making activities. This includes involvement in community-based resource management, local environmental monitoring, and village meetings.
2. **Regional Level:** Communities interact with regional stakeholders and bodies to address broader environmental issues that affect multiple communities. An example is the Niger Delta Environmental Survey, which conducted regional consultations to evaluate environmental degradation and formulate strategies for achieving sustainable development (Niger Delta Environmental Survey, 2018).
3. **National Level:** At the federal level, community representatives engage in advocacy and policy dialogues. The inclusion of representatives from the Niger Delta in discussions held by the National Assembly regarding oil and gas policies ensures that the region's specific concerns are addressed in national legislation (National Assembly, 2020).

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## The Crucial Role of Community Participation in Environmental Conservation

Community participation holds a vital position in conservation efforts within the Niger Delta, a region facing severe environmental issues primarily due to oil exploration. Local communities are to be equipped with indigenous knowledge and a thorough understanding of their environment, which is instrumental in discovering sustainable solutions and practices. By actively engaging in resource management, environmental monitoring, and restoration projects, communities can help mitigate environmental degradation and preserve biodiversity.

For instance, the significance of local engagement was demonstrated in a study by Owoeye, Ajayi, and Oyeniran (2025) concerning forest conservation in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The finding revealed that communities actively participating in conservation were more successful in maintaining forest resources and supporting sustainable land-use practices, underscoring the value of local participation and knowledge in environmental protect.

Community engagement also serves to strengthen policy advocacy by ensuring that policies accurately reflect the necessities and realities experienced by local populations. Involvement in the policy-making process allows communities to advocate for regulations and practices that safeguard their environment and encourage sustainable development. This collaborative approach cultivates a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, contributing to more sustainable and effective policy results.

In the Niger Delta, where government agencies and oil companies have traditionally made decisions with limited community consultation, incorporating local populations into policy advocacy can foster more effective and equitable environmental governance. According to the Ika Ethnic Host Communities of Nigeria Oil and Gas (2024), community participation is necessary for promoting environmental protection, equity, and transparency in areas impacted by oil and gas operations.

### Benefits of Community Participation in Environmental Conservation and Policy Advocacy.

The advantages of involving communities in environmental conservation and policy advocacy are substantial:

- **It improves policy outcomes:** Decision-making that includes communities results in policies better suited to local circumstances and needs, enhancing their effectiveness and sustainability.
- **It enhances accountability:** Community involvement requires stakeholders, including corporations and government agencies, to be accountable for their actions and ensures they fulfil their social and environmental responsibilities.
- **It strengthens social cohesion:** Collaborative efforts focused on environmental preservation build solidarity and trust among community members, which in turn leads to stronger social connections and collective action.
- **It empowers local populations:** Participation empowers communities by affording them a voice in decisions impacting their lives, fostering resilience and self-reliance.
- **It sustains resource management:** Communities actively managing their natural resources are more prone to adopting sustainable practices that protect the long-term health of their environment.

### Community-Based Conservation Initiatives

**Community-Based Conservation (CBC)** involves local populations actively participating in the protection and management of their natural resources. In Nigeria's Ekiti State, CBC has been fundamental in promoting community development and environmental sustainability. This approach combines socio-economic development with environmental conservation, utilising cultural practices and indigenous knowledge to address problems such as biodiversity loss, water pollution, and deforestation. Successful CBC projects in areas like Ondo and Cross River States demonstrate how community engagement improved biodiversity protection and support livelihoods through sustainable practices, including ecotourism and agroforestry (Osazuwa, Peter, Oghogho, Mboto, and Gogogwute, O. (2024)).

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## Participatory Environmental Education and Awareness Programmes

**Education and awareness are critical** for empowering communities to take proactive roles in conservation. In the Niger Delta, conservation education training manuals have been developed to disseminate relevant information to coastal residents. These manuals act as structured guides, educating residents on the significance of preserving their coastal environments and sustainable practices. By increasing understanding and knowledge, these programmes encourage local, community-owned actions to resolve environmental challenges (Oluwarore, Akpan, and Sogbanmu, 2021).

### Community Science and Environmental Monitoring

Community science involves engaging local citizens on environmental monitoring and scientific research. In the Niger Delta's deteriorating coastal areas, community science has been proposed as a way to involve ordinary residents in tracking environmental changes, specifically regarding biodiversity. This strategy leverages local observations and knowledge to complement scientific data, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of environmental management strategies. However, certain challenges must be overcome to fully realise its potential, including insecurity, inadequate tools, and a lack of technical expertise (Zabbey, Kpaniku, Sam, Nwipie, Okoro, Zabbey & Babatunde, 2024).

### Inclusive Environmental Decision-Making

Inclusive decision-making aims to ensure that all community members, including marginalised groups such as women, are involved in environmental governance. Within the Ogoni remediation project, efforts have been made to include women in the environmental decision-making processes. Despite being disproportionately vulnerable to environmental degradation, women have often been excluded from these processes. Engaging women not only promotes gender equity but also strengthens the effectiveness of environmental management, as women frequently possess valuable perspectives and knowledge concerning conservation and resource use.

### Community-Led Advocacy and Legal Actions

Community-led legal actions and advocacy have been instrumental in achieving environmental justice and holding polluters accountable. Communities in the Niger Delta have initiated legal proceedings against oil companies concerning environmental damages resulting from gas flaring and spills. These actions have led to landmark court rulings, requiring companies to compensate affected communities and take responsibility for their environmental impacts. Such advocacy not only seeks redress but also mobilises broader support for conservation efforts by raising awareness about environmental issues.

### Strengthening Institutional Support and Policy Frameworks

Effective community participation requires supportive policy frameworks and institutional structures. In Nigeria, community-based conservation has been integrated into the policies of the National Park Service Act, though full implementation is still pending in some parks. Ensuring the effective implementation and strengthening of these institutional frameworks can empower communities to effectively manage and conserve their natural resources (Agboola, Oluwole; & Tijani, 2022).

### Community Involvement in Policy Advocacy

Community involvement in policy advocacy is crucial for ensuring that environmental policies and regulations accurately reflect the rights and needs of local populations. Niger Delta communities have increasingly participated in shaping environmental policies, experiencing both challenges and successes.

### Role of Communities in Shaping Environmental Policies and Regulations

Communities in the Niger Delta have actively influenced environmental policies through advocacy and grassroots mobilisation. The **#StopTheGasFlare movement**, for example, utilised social media to raise awareness about the detrimental impacts of gas flaring, generating policy debates and mobilising support. These

types of initiatives have resulted in increased public pressure on policymakers to address environmental concerns (Osazuwa & Audu, 2024).

A significant example of successful community-driven advocacy campaign is the Ogoni Bill of Rights, which emerged from the Ogoni community's persistent advocacy for resource control and environmental justice. The community's sustained efforts have resulted in policy changes, including the implementation of the Ogoni Bill of Rights and ongoing discussions regarding limitations on gas flaring (Osazuwa & Audu, 2024).

Engagement between communities, oil companies, and governmental institutions has been facilitated through mechanisms such as the Global Memoranda of Understanding (**GMoU**). Chevron and Shell have adopted GMoUs to solicit community involvement in development programmes, promoting a bottom-up approach to development and ensuring transparency and accountability (Osazuwa & Audu, 2024).

### Case Studies and Examples

Community involvement has been vital in environmental conservation efforts throughout the Niger Delta. Numerous initiatives have proven that positive results can be achieved when local populations actively engage in environmental management.

- **The Ekuri Initiative** The Ekuri community in Cross River State started a conservation initiative led by the community to protect their rainforest from agricultural encroachment and logging. This project has successfully conserved over 33,600 hectares of rainforest, safeguarded biodiversity, and enhanced the community's livelihoods via eco-tourism and the sustainable harvesting of forest products. This initiative exemplifies how community-driven efforts combined with indigenous knowledge can generate significant environmental and socio-economic advantages (Pachamama Foods).
- **The Ogoni Clean-Up Project** The Ogoni community has been central to efforts aimed at environmental restoration and cleaning up oil pollution. Years of oil spills severely damaged their water and land, adversely affecting both their livelihoods and health. These activities have led to the remediation of contaminated locations, improved health results, and greater awareness about environmental protection. However, the full realisation of the project's objectives has been impeded by challenges such as inadequate financial resources, slow implementation, and political interference (Egbedi, T (2025)).
- **Emadike Shoreline Project** The Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Emadike Shoreline project in Bayelsa State to mitigate challenges related to coastal flooding and erosion. The project included the construction of an 850-meter shoreline protection utilising sheet piles and the sand filling of up to 16 hectares of land. While the affected communities have experienced some relief, the project highlights the necessity of continuous maintenance and community engagement to ensure its long-term viability (Wikipedia, 2024).
- **Mangrove Restoration in Andoni** In Rivers State, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), in collaboration with other groups, began planting mangroves in the Andoni Local Government Area to restore degraded ecosystems. The initiative also addressed the ecological harm caused by the invasive Nipa palm species. Furthermore, the establishment of the Nature Sustainable Multipurpose Cooperative Society offered assistance and training to local communities, thereby improving their capacity for managing resources sustainably (Ibunge, 2024).
- **Local Oil Spill Monitoring by CEHRD** The Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) developed an innovative community-based mechanism for monitoring and managing oil spills, referred to as Local Oil Monitoring. This scheme involved training local volunteers to monitor oil spill incidents and report them promptly to the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) using smartphones. This model has proven the effectiveness of community involvement in environmental response and monitoring by decreasing oil spill-related conflicts by 40% in Rivers and Bayelsa States (CEHRD, 2023).

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## Challenges to Community Participation in the Niger Delta

Community involvement is **essential for effective policy advocacy and environmental conservation** in the Niger Delta. However, several obstacles impede meaningful participation by local communities in these activities, and addressing these barriers is vital for promoting sustainable environmental governance in the region.

Despite the diverse forms and degrees of community participation, several difficulties prevent their involvement from being truly effective.

These key challenges include:

- **Limited Capacity and Resources** A number of communities in the Niger Delta are lacking necessary elements such as financial resources, institutional capacity, and **technical expertise** to participate efficiently in environmental management. This deficit prevents them from engaging in decision-making processes, as well as their ability to monitor and implement conservation initiatives. Without proper resources and training, community members often cannot contribute meaningfully to environmental governance.
- **Exclusion from Decision-Making Processes** Despite recognising that community involvement is important, many environmental decision-making processes in the Niger Delta are implemented using a top-down approach. As an example, the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) operating in Ogoniland has faced criticism for excluding marginalised groups, including women, from its critical decision-making processes. Since diverse viewpoints are fundamental for creating comprehensive and sustainable solutions, this exclusion undermines the efficacy and inclusivity of environmental interventions.
- **Mistrust and Historical Grievances** Long-standing grievances arising from environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and exploitation have generated mistrust among oil companies, government agencies, and communities. This pervasive mistrust acts as a barrier to collaboration and effective communication, which subsequently hinders the development of constructive partnerships necessary for successful environmental conservation efforts.
- **Inadequate Legal and Institutional Frameworks** Nigeria has put in place various environmental laws, such as the Petroleum Industry Act and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act, but the enforcement of these laws remains weak. In the Niger Delta specifically, this lack of enforcement allows for continued neglect of community rights and environmental degradation. Without robust legal structures and accountability mechanisms, communities are vulnerable and unable to assert their rights regarding environmental matters (Vitus, I (2025)).
- **Cultural and Social Barriers** Traditional social structures and cultural norms in the Niger Delta can inhibit the active participation of specific groups, especially youth and women, in environmental decision-making. Societal expectations and traditional gender roles frequently restrict the involvement of these groups, despite their having a substantial stake in environmental outcomes. It is essential to address these cultural barriers to ensure equitable representation and participation in environmental governance (Uchegbu, Okeke, & Nwankwo (2021)).
- **Conflict and Insecurity** The Niger Delta region has often experienced significant social unrest and conflict, which is frequently linked to environmental issues and how oil wealth is distributed. This instability disrupts community participation and cohesion, resulting in resources being diverted toward handling immediate security concerns rather than focusing on long-term environmental management. Furthermore, ongoing conflicts can discourage external investment and support for conservation initiatives that are led by the communities themselves.

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## **Suggestions for Enhancing Community Participation for Environmental Conservation Sustainability**

Effective community participation is considered a foundational element for both sustainable environmental conservation and effective policy advocacy in the Niger Delta. To strengthen this involvement and address existing challenges, several strategic suggestions are deemed necessary. These strategic suggestions include:

### **Strengthening Capacity-Building and Education**

A critical initial step towards improving community engagement is investing in capacity-building programmes. These programmes are designed to empower local residents by providing them with the necessary knowledge, tools, and skills needed for environmental stewardship. By offering training workshops, technical assistance, and environmental education campaigns, the capacity of communities to participate meaningfully in both conservation efforts and decision-making processes can be increased. Educational programmes that are tailored to combine scientific methodologies with indigenous knowledge can foster a sense of ownership and motivate sustained action.

### **Promoting Transparency and Accountability**

Establishing accountability and transparency in environmental governance is crucial for building trust among government agencies, corporate actors, and communities. Systems for community monitoring, regular public reporting, and open communication channels can ensure that local populations are kept informed about ongoing projects, policy decisions, and resource management issues that affect their environment. Encouraging greater civic engagement and advocacy requires strengthening the mechanisms that hold polluters accountable and ensuring that communities have access to relevant information.

### **Encouraging Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration**

Addressing the complex environmental issues present in the Niger Delta requires collaborative partnerships that involve government bodies, communities, non-governmental organisations, and private sector actors. Multi-stakeholder platforms are essential for facilitating dialogue, joint problem-solving, and resource sharing. Encouraging this type of collaboration ensures that diverse perspectives are taken into account, enhances resource mobilisation, and leverages complementary expertise to design and implement more effective conservation strategies.

### **Policy Reforms to Empower Communities**

Existing policies require review and reform to explicitly recognize and safeguard the rights of local communities within environmental governance. Legal frameworks must both provide platforms for participation in decision-making and facilitate community ownership of natural resources. Additionally, these frameworks must offer protection against environmental injustices. To enhance the equity and inclusiveness of environmental policies, it is important to incorporate gender-sensitive provisions and ensure proper representation of marginalised groups, such as youth and women.

### **Enhancing Funding and Support for Local Initiatives**

Sustainable financing is vital for supporting environmental projects that are led by communities. Development partners, donors, and governments should prioritize funding mechanisms designed to provide direct support to grassroots initiatives. Establishing micro-grants, technical assistance funds, and community development funds can enable local actors to conduct environmental monitoring, implement conservation activities, and advocate for necessary policy changes. Furthermore, creating linkages between local initiatives and larger funding bodies can amplify their sustainability and overall impact.

## CONCLUSION

Implementing these recommendations can result in the transformation of community participation in the Niger Delta from a passive role into an active, empowered force for environmental conservation. These interconnected strategies which include strengthening capacity, ensuring transparency, fostering partnerships, reforming policies, and providing sustainable funding are essential for driving positive environmental outcomes and enhancing community ownership.

This article has examined the essential function of community participation in tackling the complex environmental issues present in the Niger Delta. Achieving sustainable conservation and impactful policy advocacy is impossible without the vigorous involvement of local inhabitants. The experiences of the Niger Delta illustrate that when communities receive empowerment through capacity-building, inclusive decision-making, and sufficient backing, they transform into potent forces for environmental stewardship.

Community involvement encourages ownership, utilises indigenous expertise, and strengthens the legitimacy of both conservation initiatives and policies. It serves to connect policy frameworks with the realities on the ground at the grassroots level, thereby guaranteeing that environmental efforts are relevant to the local context and socially fair. Nevertheless, ongoing obstacles such as insufficient resources, marginalisation, lack of trust, and institutional fragilities continue to restrict the full potential benefits of community engagement.

Consequently, it is crucial that all parties involved including international partners, civil society organisations (CSOs), oil companies, and government agencies make community empowerment a primary focus in environmental governance strategies. Essential steps toward this objective include bolstering education, advancing transparency, fostering cooperation, implementing supportive policies, and guaranteeing sustained financial support. The Niger Delta can only attain enduring environmental conservation and social justice through consistent and genuine participation from the community.

The future of the Niger Delta's environment hinges upon adopting inclusive strategies that acknowledge the invaluable position of communities as guardians of their indigenous natural assets. This call-to-action implores stakeholders to work together to establish supportive conditions where communities operate as true partners, actively defining sustainable futures rather than merely receiving benefits.

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