

Oil of Poverty, Environmental Degradation and Crisis in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

Idongesit Eshiet & Grace Udoyen

Abstract

The Niger Delta is the oil-rich region of Nigeria and exploration of oil started in the region in 1958. Oil, although a natural resource, is like a double-edged sword – with the potential to ‘bless’ or ‘curse’ a nation so endowed, depending on its management. Good or bad management of oil resources has developmental implications for the environment, lives, and livelihoods of the people in the oil-producing areas. Studies have documented the negative impact of oil exploration on the Niger Delta region over the years. In response, some steps have been taken by the government to address the situation. Given this, there is a need for present studies to assess the situation. Therefore, this study investigated the effect of oil exploration on the environment, lives and livelihoods of the people of the Niger Delta region. The study location was Rivers State which was purposely selected among the nine oil-producing states of the Niger Delta region for being the most volatile. In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDS) were used to gather qualitative data from participants. In-depth interviews were administered to 9 males and nine females, ages 18 years and above, randomly selected from the most volatile oil communities. Equally, 6 FGDS were held with two homogeneous groups of males and females, respectively. Each group was comprised of eight participants who were drawn from various segments of the communities - youths, religious leaders, market leaders, family heads, etc.- who were aged 18 years and above. Responses were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were coded using the NVivo 12 software analytical tool. Coding was done based on predetermined themes deductively drawn from the study aim, including oil exploration and environmental degradation, oil exploration and poverty, and oil exploration and crisis. Findings revealed the negative impact of oil on the environment, lives, and livelihoods. Oil exploration has resulted in environmental degradation such as pollution, contamination of water bodies, loss of aquatic life, and destruction of farmlands. These have resulted in the loss of livelihoods, thus culminating in unemployment and poverty amid enormous oil wealth. Similarly, findings revealed that the inequities created by the mismanagement of oil wealth have resulted in anger, which is expressed through constant conflicts within and between communities, between communities and oil companies, and among armed groups, oil companies, and security forces. The study concludes that the various steps taken by the Nigerian government to make oil resource a ‘blessing’ rather than a ‘curse’ to the Niger Delta region have not yielded the desired result. The study recommends that poverty alleviation and livelihood enhancement infrastructures and programs should be made available to the people by the government and oil companies as a matter of urgency to ease the pains of daily living in the region.

Key words: Oil, Niger Delta, poverty, environmental degradation, conflict, pollution, Rivers State

Idongesit Eshiet & Grace Udoyen, ieshiet@unilag.edu.ng, Department of Sociology, University of Lagos

The Nigerian Journal of Business and Social Sciences, Volume 11, 2024
A Journal of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria
© 2024

Background

Oil is a natural resource. It is an invaluable gift of providence, with the potential to bless a nation so endowed with enormous wealth. Nigeria is privileged to be blessed with this gift. It ranks as Africa's largest producer of oil and the thirteenth largest producer globally. With a maximum crude oil production capacity of 2.5 million barrels per day, the oil and gas sector accounts for 65% of the total revenue earned by Nigeria and 88% of its foreign exchange earnings (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2021). Thus, Nigeria has earned enormous wealth from oil rents over the years. However, this has been dwindling in recent years due to a reduction in production, as well as the unstable pricing regime in the international oil market. Despite these challenges, Nigeria still receives the bulk of its revenue from the oil sector. In 2018, for instance, Nigeria earned about USD 32.6 billion from oil and gas, while in December 2020, oil rents accounted for N985.570 billion of Nigeria's revenues (CEIC, 2021). Equally, in 2023, Nigeria earned N29 trillion from crude oil exports, which constituted 80.6% of all recorded exports during the period (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2023).

The enormous oil wealth has, however, not had much impact on Nigeria's development profile. Nigeria still ranks among the countries with the lowest human development globally. With a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.548, Nigeria takes 161st position among the 193 countries ranked by the report (UNDP, 2024). Being a low human development country implies a high level of poverty. Thus, Nigeria is home to many poor people. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022) data reveal that 133 million Nigerians (63 per cent of the population) are multidimensionally poor. The World Bank (2024) estimated that 87 million Nigerians (38.9% of the population) lived below the

poverty line in 2023. The bank observes that this makes Nigeria the world's second-largest poor population after India.

Nigeria's oil wealth is sourced from the Niger Delta region, where oil was first discovered in Oloibiri, Rivers state (now in Bayelsa state) in 1956 and exploration began in 1958 (UNDP, 2006). Ever since, oil prospecting and exploration in the region have increased, thus making activities in the oil sector obvious. Oil exploration is, however, not without its adverse impact on the environment, when its exploitation is not done in an ecologically sustainable manner that prevents oil spills, waste dumping, and gas flaring. Evidence has shown that over the years, oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring are endemic in the Niger Delta. These have affected the rich natural endowments of land, water, forests, and fauna, resulting in damaged soil, contaminated water, and poor air quality (UNEP, 2011; Aghalino & Eyinla, 2009; Aghalino, 2009; World Bank, 2008; UNDP, 2006). Similarly, dredging, laying pipes, building infrastructure and making oil stations accessible by road and water, have equally done considerable damage to the environment (Amnesty International, 2009:18). Thus, the Niger Delta region has been described by experts as 'one of the world's most severely petroleum-impacted ecosystems' with the damage caused being chronic and cumulative, leading to a severely impaired coastal ecosystem (Amnesty International 2009:14). Similarly, The United Nations Development Programme describes the region as one suffering from 'administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict' (UNDP, 2006:9).

However, the situation in the Niger Delta has attracted much attention, both locally and internationally. There have been calls

to address the Niger Delta ‘question’ over the years. In response, several measures have been taken by the federal government to address the situation. These include – giving oil producing states 13 percent derivation fund (as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution (as amended) section 162, sub-section 2) from the federation account; establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000; commissioning the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to conduct an assessment of oil pollution in Ogoni land, in 2006; establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta in 2008; commissioning of the clean-up of Ogoni land in 2011; and recently the passage of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021, among others.

In view of these actions, present studies are needed to assess whether the negative effect of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region has been mitigated. This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the effect of oil exploration on the environment, lives, and livelihoods of the people of the Niger Delta region.

Oil Exploration and the Environment

Oil has been central to global economic development, but its exploration and extraction have also led to significant environmental degradation. The adverse environmental effects of oil exploration, particularly in oil-rich regions such as the Amazon rainforest, the Arctic and the Niger Delta in Nigeria, have been documented, as literature has highlighted a range of environmental consequences that arise from oil exploration such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil contamination, water and air pollution, etc. Finer et al. (2008) highlight that oil exploration in the Amazon has resulted in extensive deforestation, leading to habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity. Similarly, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme reveals that Arctic oil extraction threatens

fragile ecosystems and wildlife populations (AMAP, 2010).

Another of the most documented environmental consequences of oil exploration is soil and water contamination through oil spills and leakages. Studies by UNEP (2011) on the Niger Delta demonstrate how decades of oil exploration have led to extensive contamination of soil and water sources, severely affecting agricultural productivity and drinking water quality. Similarly, hydrological contamination due to improper waste disposal and crude oil spills has been observed in other oil-producing regions such as Venezuela and the Gulf of Mexico (Jernelöv, 2010). Equally, oil exploration and refining contribute to air pollution through the release of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and other pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. Studies indicate that gas flaring, common in oil-producing regions like Russia and Nigeria, releases significant amounts of carbon dioxide and methane, thus exacerbating climate change (Elvidge *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, oil-related industrial activities contribute to acid rain, which negatively affects soil fertility and aquatic ecosystems (Barth, 2003).

The environmental impact of oil exploration also extends to social and economic domains. Oil-producing communities often experience socio-economic inequalities due to environmental degradation. Scholars such as Watts (2004) and Obi (2010) argue that oil exploration has led to conflicts in regions like the Niger Delta, where communities suffer from pollution while multinational oil companies reap economic benefits. Similarly, in Ecuador, indigenous communities have faced displacement and loss of livelihood due to environmental damage caused by oil companies (Sawyer, 2004).

To minimize the environmental impact of oil exploration, various mitigation

strategies have been proposed and implemented. Advancements in oil extraction technologies, such as improved spill detection and containment measures, have been recommended to reduce environmental damage. Bioremediation techniques, as discussed by Atlas and Hazen (2011), offer promising solutions for oil spill cleanups by using microorganisms to degrade hydrocarbons. Similarly, international organizations and national governments have developed policies to regulate oil exploration. The Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement (United Nations Climate Change (UNCC), 2005; 2016) emphasize the reduction of carbon emissions from fossil fuels. In addition, countries such as Norway have implemented stringent environmental policies for offshore drilling (Norwegian Petroleum Directorate, 2019). Similarly, oil companies are increasingly adopting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to address environmental concerns. Shell, BP, and ExxonMobil have sustainability programmes focusing on reducing carbon footprints and investing in renewable energy sources (Frynas, 2005). However, these initiatives often fall short of addressing the long-term environmental damage caused by oil exploration.

These works on oil exploration and environmental degradation highlight significant challenges associated with oil exploration. While technological advancements and regulatory frameworks offer some mitigation measures, continued research and policy development are necessary to ensure sustainable oil exploration practices, hence the essence of this study to assess the impact of oil exploration on the environment, lives and livelihoods of the people of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria

The Niger Delta Region and Oil

Geographically, the Niger Delta can be described as the world's third largest

wetland and coastal marine ecosystems that are blessed with massive oil deposits. While physically, it can be described as 'comprising the area covered by the natural delta of the Niger River and the areas to the east and west. Its geology and hydrology can equally define its natural limits. Thus, its approximate northern boundaries are located close to the bifurcation of the Niger River at Aboh, while its western and eastern boundaries are around the Benue River and the Imo River, respectively' (UNDP, 2006:19). By these definitions, the Niger Delta is estimated to cover approximately 25,900 square kilometres. However, for political expedience and administrative convenience, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) defines the Niger Delta as comprising the nine oil producing states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers states, and these cover a land area of approximately 75,000 square kilometres (Omuta, 2011). This study is predicated on this broader definition of the Niger Delta.

Oil exploration began in the Niger Delta at Oloibiri, Rivers State (now Bayelsa State) in 1958, and ever since activities in the oil industry have expanded in scope and magnitude. Today, the oil industry is evident in the region, and activities of oil exploration cover a massive land mass. Oil pipelines can be seen crisscrossing the entire region, with oil wells and flow stations being familiar sights (Amnesty International, 2009). However, oil exploration is not without its adverse impact on the environment, as our literature review has shown.

In recognition of this negative correlation between extractive activities and the environment, international development bodies have devised instruments (such as the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement) that impose an obligation on States to ensure ecologically sustainable exploitation of natural resources (United Nations, 2016). However, in Nigeria, oil companies

operated in the Niger Delta region for decades without the Nigerian State adhering to the international obligation of ensuring ecologically sustainable extraction of natural resources through appreciable legislation and regulation. For instance, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency was not established until 1988. Similarly, laws on environmental quality standards on emissions and effluent discharge, and the requirement for an environmental impact assessment for every major project, were not enacted until the early 1990s (UNDP, 2006:81).

Thus, by the time the Nigerian government woke up to its responsibility and improved the regulatory environment of oil exploration, much damage had already been done to the Niger Delta environment. However, despite the improved regulatory environment, there has not been an improvement in the practices of oil companies in their prospecting and exploration activities. Much has not changed due to the weak regulatory enforcement that has been marred by poor governance, corruption, and a lack of accountability. This has given oil companies leeway to continue their operations without regard to regulations. Oil exploration activities are still carried out without compliance with global standards and best practices. Hence, Amnesty International (2009:10) comments that “the Niger Delta provides a stark case study of the lack of accountability of a government to its people and of multinational companies’ almost total lack of accountability, when it comes to the impact of their operations’ on the environment and people. Amnesty International (2009) further documents how the inequities and human rights violations caused by oil exploration has turned the Niger Delta region into a theatre of war, characterised by constant conflict, which manifests in different dimensions, such as conflict within and between communities; conflict between communities and oil

companies; and conflict among armed groups (militants), oil companies and Nigerian security forces.

Methods

The qualitative approach was used to conduct the study. In-depth interviews and Focus Group discussions (FGDs) were used to gather the field data. The study location was Rivers state, which was purposely selected from the nine oil-producing states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. Rivers State was chosen because it is the most volatile of the oil-producing states. A total of eighteen participants, comprising nine males and nine females, aged 18 years and above, were interviewed. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Rivers State was stratified along the three senatorial districts – Rivers East, Rivers West, and Rivers South-East, and the most vulnerable local governments to oil exploration activities (based on documented records) were purposely selected from each of the senatorial districts. Thus, Emohua LGA was selected from Rivers East, while Ahoada LGA was selected from Rivers West, and Gokana LGA was selected from Rivers South-East. From the three LGAs, the most vulnerable communities (based on documented records) were selected - Rumuekpe in Emohua LGA, Bodo in Gokana LGA, and Akinima in Ahoada West LGA. Six participants, comprising three males and three females, were randomly selected and interviewed in each of the communities.

In order to get an expanded view of the issues investigated, six FGDs were conducted - two in each of the communities for two homogeneous groups of males and females, respectively. Each group comprised eight participants who were drawn from various segments of the communities - youths, religious leaders, market leaders, family heads, etc., ages 18 years and above. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion guides were used to

gather information on issues such as oil exploration activities and their effects on the environment, lives, and livelihoods. The average time for the interview was 24 minutes, while the FGD lasted for about 50 minutes. Respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was sought. Only respondents who consented to participate in the study were interviewed. Similarly, anonymity and confidentiality were observed throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Responses were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were coded using the NVivo 12 software tool for analysing qualitative data. Coding was done deductively, based on pre-determined themes derived from the study aim. The themes include oil exploration and environmental degradation, oil exploration and poverty, and oil exploration and crisis.

Results

The results are discussed under the respective themes of oil exploration and environmental degradation, oil exploration and poverty, and oil exploration and crisis in the Niger Delta.

Oil Exploration and Environmental Degradation

Finding revealed the continuous devastating impact of oil activities on the Niger Delta environment. Oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring are still endemic in the Niger Delta and these have affected the rich natural endowments of land, water, forests and fauna of the region, resulting in damaged soil, contaminated water and poor air quality as illustrated by these responses from some study participants -

The activities of oil companies have affected the river where we fish. The fish from our river is now poisonous. The oil

kills the fish and reduces those not killed to smaller sizes. The farmland is also affected. When you dig for planting, what you see are particles of messy oil, and if, peradventure, you plant there, the seed either dies, or what comes out is very small. Now look at the plantain we are harvesting, it's pretty small in size.

(Male, 55 years, Rumuekpe FGD1).

Oil exploration has affected our environment. Now, gas flaring emits black particles into the air. You can notice black particles on your clothes. We also breathe in these particles, and they affect our health. Gas flaring affects our roof, too. If you roof your house, within two months, it turns red, and you have to replace it. Oil activities have destroyed our environment. Our God-given water is polluted, the land is polluted, and the air is polluted.

(Female, 45 years, Rumuekpe ID11).



Figure 1: Polluted river at Rumuekpe



Figure 2: Affected farmland in Rumuekpe

Oil exploration and Poverty

Finding revealed that although the Niger Delta is the goose that lays the golden egg and the engine of Nigeria's economy, the region nevertheless suffers from neglect and abandonment. The enormous oil wealth produced by the region has not translated into infrastructural development and improved well-being for the people of the region. The people wallow in abject poverty and penury, lacking basic amenities such as potable water, healthcare, housing, sanitation, schools, transportation, etc. Thus, the Niger delta presents a paradox of abject poverty in the midst of abundance, as

buttressed by the below assertions from participants -

We have about four oil companies operating here, but no road, no hospital, no school, even the public school we have, the teachers are not there for our children. We lose older adults often because we cannot carry a sick person to a nearby hospital, it costs a lot of money, and even when you have the money, the bikes (*means of transportation*) are not there to carry them out for treatment. They (*oil companies*) intentionally refuse to help us out of poverty. (Male, 55 years, community leader, Rumuekpe, FGD1).

Further findings revealed that not only are people deprived of sharing in their oil wealth, but oil exploration also engenders poverty. They argue that it is the presence of oil in their region that has made them poor, as their lives and livelihoods have been adversely affected by oil exploration activities. This has pushed them into deeper levels of poverty and deprivation. These excerpts demonstrate the negative impact of oil wealth on the lives and livelihoods of the people –

We live on subsistence farming, but oil activities have perpetuated the increase in our people's tears. The fishing activities in this community are now history. Yes! It is history because our children will only hear that we were fishermen and women.

(Male, 56 years, Bodo, IDI6).

Oil exploration has affected our farming activities, our plantations, our cocoyam, and all that we plant is affected. We do not have the successful yields we had before. What we plant comes out in a small size. The oil chemicals poison the fish. Those of us who were trading in fish are out of a job now. You can see the evidence when you get to the waterside. There you will see dead fish by the riverside. The oil pushes the dead fish to the shoreline, and we cannot eat them. We are suffering here.

(Female, 48 years, Bodo, FGD3)

For me, the oil companies have had a negative impact on the lives of people, including me. The water is contaminated; we drink this water and get sick. Now we get sick, and no hospitals around to treat us. Health, they say, is wealth; our health condition is affected as a

result of the bad water we drink. The air is also polluted; we inhale polluted air and eat poisonous fish from contaminated water. Farmers, fishermen, and women are impacted negatively, as they no longer have a primary source of income. For me, I will say that everybody in the Niger Delta is affected one way or the other, is either your life is cut short or you live in poverty since you cannot farm or fish on your land any longer.

(Female, 48 years, Akinnima, FGD5).

These oil activities are a curse to this community. I am saying this because the coming of oil has stopped us from taking our three-square meals. Apart from this, the yam, cocoyam, and plantain cannot grow as they used to. Again, we have no market, so we all have to go to another community for a market to buy and sell.

(Female, 38 years, Rumuekpe, FGD2)

Unemployment is on the increase because we are not farming or fishing as before, and so in the absence of jobs, most of our youths are found involved in criminal activities like stealing, using drugs, cultism, and all sorts of things. In fact, it will shock you to know

that our young women engage in prostitution because they have nothing to do, and the funny thing is, they go for the oil company staff.

(Male, 42 years, Bodo, ID17).



Figure 3: Source of drinking water at Bodo



Figure 4: Roofing condition at Bodo

Oil and Crisis in the Niger Delta

Finding revealed that the inequities generated by oil exploration in the Niger Delta have turned the region into a theatre of war, characterised by constant conflict which manifests in different dimensions, such as conflict within and between

communities; conflict between communities and oil companies; and conflict among armed groups and oil companies and Nigerian security forces. Further findings affirmed that the conflicts are rooted in the discontent, anger, poverty, powerlessness, and frustrations suffered by the people due to the negative impact of oil exploration activities. Thus, protests by local communities against oil companies demanding for clean-up after oil spills and for compensation for damages are familiar sights in the Niger Delta. A community member in Rumuekpe explained the cause of the constant conflict in the area -

What is causing conflict in the Niger Delta is the oil. We have money from the oil, but we are suffering. No other thing apart from these oil companies using and destroying our land and water without compensation to the land. In this community, we have Agip (*oil company*), Shell (*oil company*), and Elf (*oil company*), but there is not even a good road that leads to where they produce the oil. No health care facilities, no market, no school. So, this is why there is a conflict here.

(Female, 43years, Rumuekpe, FGD2)

Findings also revealed that in-fighting among community members and between members of different communities, in the quest to access the benefits of oil operations or have shares in compensation, is frequent and intense, often leading to the loss of lives and destruction of properties. Describing the power tussles in the Niger Delta, a community member in Bodo made this assertion –

Politically, oil exploration has brought about power tussles among communities in Ogoniland. The elders fight to get the most significant share from the oil companies; some communities with less voice do not have their share at all.

(Male, 56 years, Bodo, IDI8)

Our finding showed that the Niger Delta has remained a theatre of war with several groups of restive, angry and hopeless youths, ventilating their anger through violence. The crisis has become more intense over the years, with the emergence of armed youths (militants) and other criminal gangs on the scene. This has compounded the problem. These groups seek resource control and agitate for an increase in the derivation formula, in order for the federal government to allot more revenue to oil-producing states. In the quest to achieve these, they have taken up arms against the state, engage in acts of sabotage such as vandalizing oil pipes and stealing the oil, disrupting and blowing up oil operation installations thereby crippling oil production, illegal refining of oil, bunkering, kidnapping of oil workers and other persons, confrontation with armed security personnel, contentions with traditional rulers over access to oil contracts and employment. And fighting with rival youth gangs. These responses evidenced the situation -

When you talk about youths' restiveness and criminality in this community, the oil companies are the cause of it all. This community is the second place where oil was found, and we have no health centre, road, water, or market. They signed a memorandum of understanding with the community, but none has been implemented. So, the option for the youths is destruction and vandalism of properties. Insecurity becomes high as the oil companies and the state governments pay a deaf ear to the problem of the community. Youth criminality was so high in this community that it caused everybody to run away. You can see, we are just trying to come back now, praying for peace to reign.

(Male, 56 years, Rumuekpe, FGD1).

The oil companies came into our community, but they refused to employ our youth. As a result of their refusal to employ our youths, the youths started demanding their rights through violence. We cannot rule out youths'

restiveness, specifically in Rivers State. In spite of the fact that youths are showing their grievances through protest, as in some years back, we made a peaceful protest by blocking the East-West Road and locking up all oil companies operating in Rumuekpe, neither the government nor the oil companies have responded to our plight. This is our Nigeria for you.
(Female, 45 years, Rumuekpe, IDI9)

Youth militancy in the Niger Delta happened because we were cheated. Oil is found in the Niger Delta, but others are enjoying it. It is not that the youths deliberately get involved in militancy, but they are grieved for what should have been given to them. Youths use confrontational or violent means to get what they want because the government has been too silent on environmental issues in the Niger Delta.
(Male, 42 years, Akinnima, IDI12)

Conflict in the Niger Delta will only stop when our resources are used correctly.

Mismanagement and the use of our resources for politicians' benefits are factors in youths' militancy.
(Female, 28 years, Bodo, FGD3)

Youth restiveness and criminality in the Niger Delta occur because the youth have been deprived, neglected, and marginalized in their region. When our youths engaged in agitation, like what happened in Rumuekpe over the last few years, it was because they wanted the restoration of their rights in the community. When they failed, a crisis erupted in the community.
(Male, 34 years, Rumuekpe, IDI6).

Discussion

Oil, a natural resource given by God as a blessing to humanity has become a resource 'curse' to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The findings of this study revealed that oil exploration has negatively impacted on the environment, lives and livelihoods of the Niger Delta region. Oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring have affected the rich natural endowments of land, water, forests and fauna of the Niger Delta resulting in damaged soil, contaminated water and poor air quality. This finding aligns with that of UNEP (2011) which argues that oil exploration in the Niger Delta has resulted in extensive contamination of soil and water sources,

thus, severely affecting agricultural productivity and drinking water quality. It is also in line with the AMAP (2010) study, which documents how oil extraction threatens fragile ecosystems and wildlife populations in the Arctic.

Findings also revealed that despite the enormous oil wealth in the region, the lives and livelihoods of the people have not been positively impacted. Oil-producing communities still lack basic amenities. Potable water, access roads, electricity, drainage, hospitals, schools, markets, etc., are either non-existent or in very deplorable states. At the same time, the destruction of livelihoods emanating from environmental degradation has increased unemployment, deprivation, and poverty. This finding affirms that of an earlier study by the United Nations Development Programme (2006:9), which described the region as suffering from 'administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict'.

Our findings further revealed that unemployment and the accompanying poverty and deprivation have resulted in anger, frustrations, and deep-seated mistrust and resentment among community members. The social capital of trust and bonding among community members has been destroyed. Thus, respect for traditional authority has been desecrated, as restive youths confront traditional rulers and community elders in their quest to have access to oil wealth through compensation, clean-up contracts, and employment quotas. Violence and protests have become a normal experience in the oil-producing communities. This finding is in line with that of Obi (2010) who argues that oil exploration has led to conflicts in the Niger Delta, where communities suffer from pollution while multinational oil companies reap economic benefits.

We also found that constant oil spills, poor and ill-timed response to clean up such spills, compounded by inadequate compensation, are constant triggers of protests by community members. Restive youths also use such occasions to confront armed security personnel sent by the government to quell such protests. Thus, the Niger Delta has become a constant theatre of war. This finding aligns with that of Amnesty International (2009), which documents the multi-dimensional nature of conflict in the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

The study has highlighted the ineffectiveness of the various steps taken by the Nigerian government to turn oil from being a resource 'curse' to a resource 'blessing' in the Niger Delta. To date, oil spills, gas flaring, and other hazards associated with oil exploration are still ongoing. At the same time, the lack of basic infrastructure, poverty, and deprivation are still evident in the region. Based on the finding of this study, we argue that the Niger Delta 'question' may be challenging to address, if the Nigerian development 'question' remains unresolved. The Nigerian development question is that of 'mis-governance'. Evidence shows that Nigeria is the fourth worst governed country globally, ranking very low in all the indices of good governance such as leadership and foresight; robust laws and policies; strong institutions; financial stewardship; attractive market place; global influence and reputation; and helping people rise (Chandler Institute of Good Governance, 2023). We therefore posit that until Nigeria fixes her governance 'question', the Niger Delta question may remain unresolved.

Thus, environmental degradation, poverty and conflict may remain a prevailing problem in the Niger Delta. We therefore recommend that poverty alleviation and livelihood enhancement infrastructures and programmes be made available to the

people by the government and oil companies as a matter of urgency. This is to alleviate the pains of daily living as reflected by these responses from participants – ‘let the government settle the communities, at least by giving us potable water, good roads, a hospital, and many

more’. ‘Oil companies should employ our youths, give good and standard health facilities, and look into our drainage issues.’

References

- Aghalino, S.O. (2009). Gas Flaring, Environmental Pollution and Abatement Measures in Nigeria, 1969-2001. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 11 (4): 219-238.
- Aghalino, S. O and Eyinla, B. (2009). Oil Exploration and the Marine Pollution: Evidence from the Niger Delta Nigeria. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 28(3): 178.
- All Africa (2020). Nigeria: NDDC – a Disturbing Cesspool of Corruption. Retrieved from <https://allafrica.com> on April 22, 2021.
- AMAP (2010). Assessment 2007: Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic - Effects and Potential Effects. Volume 2. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), Oslo, Norway. vii + 277 pp.
- Amnesty International Publications (2009). *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta*. London: Amnesty International Publications.
- Amnesty International, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), Friends of the Earth Europe & Milieudefensie (2020). No Clean-Up, No Justice: An Evaluation of the Implementation of UNEP’s Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland Nine Years on. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/no-clean-up-no-justice-shell-oil-pollution-in-the-niger-delta/> accessed April 20, 2021.
- Atlas, R. M., & Hazen, T. C. (2011). Oil Biodegradation and Bioremediation: A Tale of the Two Worst Spills in U.S. History. *Environmental Science & Technology*, 45(16): 6709-6715.
- Barth, M. C. (2003). Acid Rain and Its Impact on the Environment. *Journal of Environmental Sciences*, 15(1), 10-17.
- Chandler Institute of Good Governance (2023). *Chandler Good Government Index, 2023*. Singapore: Chandler Institute of Good Governance
- CEIC (2021). Gross Federation Account Revenue: Oil 2005 - 2020 | Quarterly | NGN bn | Central Bank of Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/nigeria/government-revenue-and-expenditure/gross-federation-account-revenue-oil> on March 26, 2021.
- Elvidge, C. D., et al. (2009). A Fifteen-Year Record of Global Natural Gas Flaring Derived from Satellite Data. *Energies*, 2(3), 595-622; <https://doi.org/10.3390/en20300595>
- Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (2021). Overview. Retrieved from https://eiti.org/es/implementing_country/32 on March 27, 2021.

- Federal Government of Nigeria (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)*. Abuja: Federal Government of Nigeria.
- Finer, M., Jenkins, C. N., Pimm, S. L., Keane, B., & Ross, C. (2008). Oil and Gas Projects in the Western Amazon: Threats to Wilderness, Biodiversity, and Indigenous Peoples. *PLoS ONE*, 3(8), e2932.
- Frynas, J. G. (2005). The False Developmental Promise of Corporate Social Responsibility: Evidence from Multinational Oil Companies. *International Affairs*, 81(3): 581-598.
- Guardian Newspaper (2020). NDDC: A Disturbing Corruption Alarm. Editorial. Retrieved from <https://m.guardian.ng> on April 22, 2021.
- International Crisis Group (2009). Nigeria: Seizing the Moment in the Niger Delta. Policy Briefing No. 60. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org> on April 22, 2021.
- Jernelöv, A. (2010). The Threats from Oil Spills: Now, Then, and in the Future. *Ambio*, 39(5-6): 353-366.
- KPMG Advisory Services (2017). The Petroleum Industry Governance Bill. Newsletter. Retrieved from <https://assets.kpmg.pdf> on April 22, 2021.
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), (2023). *Foreign Trade in Goods Statistics (Q3 2023)*. Abuja: NBS.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2022). *Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022)*. Abuja: NBS. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/1241254>
- Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) 2021. Oil Production. Retrieve from <https://nnpcgroup.com/NNPC-Business/Upstream-Ventures/Pages/Oil-Production.aspx> on March 27, 2021.
- Norwegian Petroleum Directorate (2019). Regulatory Measures in Offshore Oil Exploration. <https://www.sodir.no/en/whats-new/publications/reports/resource-report/resource-report-2019/>
- Obi, C. I. (2010). Oil Extraction, Dispossession, Resistance, and Conflict in Nigeria's Oil-Rich Niger Delta. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 30(1-2), 219-236.
- Omuta, G. E. D. (2011). *Poverty and Environmental Quality in the Niger Delta Region: Dependence on Biomass Fuels as the Source of Household Energy*. Benin City: Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED).
- Sawyer, S. (2004). *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- The Petroleum Industry Act (2021). <https://www.pwc.com/ng/en/publications/nigeria-petroleum-industry-act.html>.
- United Nations. (2016). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations.
- United Nations Climate Change (2016). The Paris Agreement. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

United Nations Climate Change (UNCC) (2005). What is the Kyoto Protocol?
https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol

United Nations Development Programme (2024). *Human Development Report 2023/2024: Breaking the gridlock. Reimagining cooperation in a polarised world*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

United Nations Development Programme (2006). *Niger Delta Development Report*. Abuja, Nigeria: United Nations Development Programme.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2011). *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland*. Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Watts, M. (2004). Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil, and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Geopolitics*, 9(1), 50-80.

World Bank in Nigeria (2024). Overview.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview>.

World Bank (2020). *Poverty and Shared Prosperity: Reversals of Fortune*. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

World Bank (2008). *Republic of Nigeria, Niger Delta Social and Economic Conflict Analysis*. Sustainable Development Department, African Region.

World Health Organization (2002). *The Health Effects of Industry Air Pollution Exposure in Developing Countries*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO.