

Green Crimes, Petro-violence and the Tragedy of Oil: The Case of the Niger-Delta in Nigeria

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Oil has played a major role in the development dynamics of the Nigerian nation. Due to institutional corruption and fiscal mismanagement, Nigeria's oil wealth has brought more ruin than blessing to the natural environment, children and youths. The oil industry in Nigeria is characterised by a vicious cycle of violence involving the state, multinational oil companies, and lately a group of indigenous armed youth in the Niger Delta region. In effect, the struggle for the control of oil wealth in Nigeria plays out in the pipelines. Petro-violence, green crimes and ecological disasters in the country reflect the level of social and economic malaise in Nigeria. Oil-related violence and disasters, particularly oil pipeline explosions, are the consequences of unsustainable practices in oil exploration, political corruption, and rent- distribution politics in the country. These local dynamics are fuelled by the unsustainable system of global capitalism. The exploitation of the available social capital potential through collaborative partnership and development dialogue of all stakeholders, especially those in the oil-producing communities, is imperative for the sustainable management of oil in Nigeria.

Key Words: Oil exploration, Environmental pollution, Petro-violence and disasters.

Introduction

This paper explores the increasing vulnerability of the natural environment of the Niger-Delta region in Nigeria to violence and disaster caused by oil pipeline explosions and other oil exploration activities. Oil brings wealth and socio-economic development to oil-producing states and regions, albeit with some fundamental challenges. The same resource has brought untold misery, repression and unmitigated environmental devastation to oil-producing regions in Nigeria. This study locates oil-related violence and disasters and its impacts on the environment within the contexts of unsustainable resource exploitation by oil companies, political corruption, and rent distribution politics in the country. The rationale behind this study is to contribute to social and economic reform processes for the sustainable exploitation of oil and natural gas resources in Nigeria. This study is driven by the following research questions: 1) what are the causes of *petro-violence* and green crimes in the Niger Delta region¹ in particular and in Nigeria in general?; 2) What are the social and economic consequences (including environmental destruction) of oil disasters in Niger-Delta Communities?; and 3) how does oil wealth cause ethnic conflict and rivalry among oil-producing communities, the state

¹ The territory of the Niger Delta cuts across eight of Nigeria's 36 states, but the core areas are in Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers states.

and prospective oil companies Nigeria? Many scholars (Ross, 2003; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 1999) have studied the social, economic and environmental impacts of oil extraction in Nigeria. This paper draws on these studies, including comparative studies of resource curse phenomena in resource-abundant developing countries (Karl, 1997; Sachs and Warner, 2001), to cast light on the rising trend of petro-violence – a dimension of resource curse in Nigeria.

By triangulating resource curse and social capital theoretical frameworks (Auty, 1997; Karl, 1997; Putnam, 2000), the study reviews the causes and consequences of *petro-violence* and oil pipeline explosion in host communities in Nigeria. This paper presents four interrelated sets of solution to the increasing wave of petro-violence in the country, namely: the adoption of sustainable practices for oil resource exploitation by oil companies in Nigeria; transparent governance and institutions; the diversification and development of agricultural and manufacturing sectors with oil wealth; and the involvement of oil-producing communities in Nigeria in the management of oil resources through collaborative partnership initiatives.

Resource curse and social capital deficit in Nigeria

Oil wealth, if managed well, provides the capacity for social and economic transformation. However, many studies have shown that most oil-producing states, particularly those in the developing world, are characterised by high level of abject poverty, political corruption and instability as well as social upheaval (Auty, 1993; 1997; 2004; Karl, 1997; Sachs and Warner, 2001). One of the theoretical models used to explain the above phenomenon is the resource curse theory (Auty, 1993; 1997; Karl, 1997). This states that developing countries which obtain a substantial proportion of their national revenue from specific natural resources (e.g., oil, rubber, diamond and minerals) are more likely to have negative economic growth and development in general. Despite occasional economic boom, such resource-rich states have lower economic growth than resource-poor countries (Auty, 1993; Sachs and Warner, 2001). In essence, resource-deficient developing countries are compelled by the scarce resources to maximise productivity by fostering competitive economic growth, which in effect triggers an expansion of labour-intensive manufacturing sector. This ensures efficiency both in political governance and in economic investments. The resource curse thesis maintains that resource-rich countries are not able to use the revenue derived from natural resources such as oil to boost their economies. Rather, dependence on the key resource *undermines* the competitiveness of other sectors in the economy (Harford and Klein, 2005). The 'Dutch Disease'² model of the resource curse further argues that windfall gains from natural resources, particularly oil, increases a country's average propensity to import, increases its exchange rate, contracts other trade-able sectors thereby causing a crowding-out effect on other sectors of the economy (Ross, 2003). This results in a negative growth

² This economic phenomenon was first observed in the Netherlands in the 1960s, when large reserves of natural gas in the North Sea were initially exploited (Overseas Development Institute, 2006)

rate for basic economic indicators such as the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Hausmann and Rigobon, 2002).

Due to the “enclave” nature of oil and gas production, income from oil extraction concentrates in few hands without trickling down to every part of the economy. As the Overseas Development Institute (2006) observes, the oil industry employs a handful of highly-skilled and well-paid workers thereby creating and supporting what HRW (1999), called “a labor aristocracy” for Nigeria. Foreign expatriates make up a good measure of the workforce and most of the capital inputs are imported from abroad. Thus, oil industry in Nigeria is not pro-poor and inward-looking. The local economy does not benefit from the multiplier effect of capital expenditure in oil production (Ross, 2003; Ukiwo, 2009).

Although Nigeria made over 400 Billion USD as revenue from oil between 1956 and 2006 (Daily Trust Newspaper, November 16, 2006), a significant percentage of this wealth was mismanaged or stolen by the military and civilian leaders of the country. For example, Nigeria's former military dictator, General Sani Abacha was reported to have stolen 4 billion USD in the 1990s (Gary and Karl, 2003). Little of the oil money allocated to state and local governments from the federal account is spent on genuine development projects for the benefit of the poor. It is not an exaggeration that more people live in poverty in Nigeria than any other country in Africa. Nigeria is ranked among the 13 poorest countries in the world (Policy Project, 2002). According to a Situation Assessment Analysis published in 2001 by Nigeria's National Planning Commission and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Despite its oil wealth, Nigeria has performed worse, in terms of basic social indicators, than sub-Saharan Africa as a whole and much worse than other regions of the developing world, such as Asia and Latin America" (IRIN News, 2002). The rate of infant mortality in Nigeria is among the highest in the world, and more than 70 percent of the population lives on less than a dollar a day (UNDP, 2001 cited in Gary and Karl, 2003; Ploeg, 2006). In view of the size of Nigeria's oil windfall over the years, there is no justification for such a wide gap in income in the country, particularly in oil-producing communities. As Ross (2003: 7) notes:

Had each year's oil rents [in Nigeria] been invested in a fund that yielded just five percent real interests, at the end of 1999 the fund would be worth \$454 billion. If divided among the general population, every man, woman, and child would receive about \$3,750, equivalent to about 15 years of wages.

Such cumulative economic distortion creates enormous social tension, especially among jobless youths. The sense of injustice and economic exploitation is fuelled by what Ukiwo (2009) referred to as “elite kleptocracy and mass opportunism.” These factors, which have resulted in an intense demand among oil-producing states for greater or fair share of oil revenue, have their foundation in Nigeria's competitive and pseudo-federalism. Resource revenue control in Nigeria has continuously shifted from the hands of regional governments to the federal government. Resource-producing regions/states controlled 100 percent of resource revenues between 1953 and 1960, 50 percent after independence, and from 45 percent to 13 percent from 1970 to 1999 (Ukiwo, 2009). Thus, as the oil-producing regions in the Niger Delta, which are also minority ethnic groups, received less revenue, the federal

government, controlled and dominated by three major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) gained more.

Generally, Nigerian youths harbour a high sense of deprivation, especially against the Nigerian state, political elite and oil companies operating in the country. The youths, particularly those in oil-producing communities and those in communities host to oil pipelines share in the single motive to wrest oil resource rent by force. In their desperate bid to obtain share of the "National Cake," many of these youths have resorted to acts of abduction, hostage-taking, sabotage against oil installations, kidnapping and extra-judicial killings. This motive, coupled with other factors, has caused many deaths and havoc on the natural environment through incidents of oil pipeline explosion and oil spillages in the country.

The resource curse framework does not offer a comprehensive explanation for sustained economic growth or lack thereof in resource-rich developing countries. For example, a country such as Botswana has successfully utilised the revenue from the export of diamonds to transform itself from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle-income country with a per capita GDP of \$11,200 in 2006 (CIA, 2007). As Boschini *et al* (2005) contend, the resource curse theory has failed to explain the reason behind successful economic performance of resource-rich developing countries like Botswana. Arguably, as robust as the resource curse model may be, its analytical utility is case-specific and cannot be generalised (Pedro, 2004). Despite the argument against this model, it is empirically and theoretically valid for Nigeria, particularly illustrating the tragedy of resource abundance.

Abundance of oil and over-reliance on the commodity has stifled sustained economic growth, human capital creation and accumulation. Not only has oil wealth encouraged corruption in all levels of government, it has also weakened social systems and promotes rent-seeking.³ These trends are further emboldened by the strategic nature of oil in the global economy, coupled with the spiralling world oil prices, generally known as oil-boom in Nigeria. The insatiable demand for crude oil in the global market is symbiotically related to social, economic and ecological crises in the Niger-Delta. Most often, major interests in the global oil market are only concerned with the security of crude oil supplies: oil companies want uninterrupted production to meet global demand and to secure high profit; political leaders in the industrialised countries such as the United States and Britain want to ensure cheap crude oil prices for steady economic growth; and end-users of oil (such as petrol/gas for cars and heating oil for homes) want cheap prices at the station. With respect to its environmental and socio-economic impacts, crude oil is an unsustainable source of energy. Despite its role in global environmental pollution as well as the negative impacts of its production in local communities such as those in the Niger Delta, its demand has been on the rise. Reliance on cheap and unsustainable

³ Rent seeking means when an individual, organisation of firm extracts uncompensated value from the society through the manipulation of government apparatuses without making a commensurate contribution to productivity. Rent-seeking is used to describe unethical gains such as the control of public land and other natural resources, which may cause substantial losses to the society. The phrase was coined by the economist Gordon Tulluck in 1967 and popularised by Anne Krueger in 1974. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/RentSeeking.html>

sources of energy remains a major characteristic of the present capitalist economic system. The revenue generated in the oil industry from countries in the centre to those in the periphery is yet to be channelled toward sustainable development. Thus, the activities of the global oil industry runs counter to the goals of sustainable development.

Unfortunately, oil revenue is usually squandered and misappropriated by both the military and civilian ruling elite in the country. The Nigerian economy has performed poorly when compared with its resource-poor counterparts. As Auty (2004, p.31) puts it, "in 1960 the average per capita GDP of the resource-rich developing market economies was more than 50 per cent above that of resource-poor countries, but by the late 1990s the resource-poor countries had closed the gap." The illusion of progress and strength oil wealth creates in an economy like that of Nigeria is vividly illustrated by Kapuscinski in reference to Iran: "Oil creates the illusion ... of a completely changed life, life without work, for free ... The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident... In this sense oil is a fairy tale and like every fairy tale a bit of a lie" (Kapuscinski, 1982: 35 cited in Watts, 2004: 51). This also shows the mindset of resource-rich developing countries like Nigeria, engendering what Auty (2004) called "factional or predatory states." This is a situation in which the state is subjected to exploitation by many competing groups. Thus, for Nigeria, oil has been a source of enormous wealth for the state, the military and ruling elite, all at the expense of human capital development and ecological stability.

Oil Capital erodes Social Capital

Oil has generated huge amounts of petro-dollars, which fuelled national development in Nigeria over the years. Paradoxically, financial capital from oil has caused the erosion of social capital, in the oil-producing communities in the Niger-Delta in particularly, and in communities across Nigeria. All elements of the resource curse framework work against the accumulation of social capital in society. For this study, social capital has to do with the basic resources inherent in social relations, which facilitate collective action. Social capital resources include trust, norms, and networks of organisations and institutions representing any group, which gathers consistently for a common objective (Putnam, 2000; Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002; Murphy and Bendell, 1999). A particular practice high in social capital is reciprocity, which encourages bargaining, compromise and cooperation. These principles are essential elements for governance and sustainable community development.

Social capital theory, which has acquired a multidisciplinary status, was stimulated by the writings of scholars such as James Coleman (1988, 1990) and Robert Putnam (2000). An asset, social capital engenders cooperation among groups, communities and institutions. Besides this, its benefits include other related elements, such as information sharing, collective action and decision-making and reduction of what Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) called "opportunistic behaviour." Thus, understanding collaborative partnership requires the examination of the stock of social capital that

groups of partners share. The application of this concept is based on the cooperation which the availability of social capital can engender. Social capital can therefore translate to the ability of people in groups, organisation and institutions to work together for common purposes. The various manifestations of resource curse, including social capital deficit have collectively brought ecological, social and economic decline in Nigeria. Suffice it to say, the negative impact of oil abundance in Nigeria, which is attributable to the high-rent-seeking capacity of the state, affects a large proportion of women, children and youths. These factors are at the core of petro-violence in the country and have also undermined ecological stability and a sustainable diversification of the economy. Oil wealth has caused great inequality and frustration communities the Niger-Delta. Even with the increase in the derivation revenue allocation to 13 in 2000, the level of poverty and Gini coefficient¹ in the region has remained high (Ukiwo, 2009). This situation is particularly aggravated by the corrupted political elite in the Niger-Delta.

Theoretical models of Petro-Violence and Social Capital deficit

The term “violence” is subject to a variety of interpretations. Many would agree that all forms of violence entail the absence of social harmony or social capital. Violence involves the use of force to inflict physical or psychological pain and injury on a human person, regardless of the act. However, from this point, opinions may diverge regarding what constitutes petro-violence or how the production of petroleum may cause violence. The term ‘Petro-violence’ was coined by Professor Michael Watts of the University of California at Berkeley. He described it as the “violence that so often attends the extraction of oil” (Watts 1999, p.1) and feeds on rent-seeking politics and the corrupt political environment. The scope of violence includes “both biological violence...perpetrated on the biophysical world, [on the natural environment] and the social violence, criminality, and degeneracy associated with petro-wealth and with its ecological destructiveness” (ibid). However, petro-violence goes beyond the process of extracting crude oil from the ground; most of the devastating violence takes place in oil fields, communities, villages and peasant farmlands where lives have been grossly distorted.

Daniel Yergin (1991, quoted in Watts, 2004, p.75) observes that the history of petroleum is “replete with criminality, violence and the worst of frontier capitalism.” Watts went further to add that “graft, autocratic thuggery, and the most grotesque exercise of imperial power are its hallmarks” (ibid). Petro-violence as an act includes armed struggle between the state and militia groups and bloody repressive activities by all the elements of what Michael Watts (2004) called the “oil complex.” The landscape of petro-violence and disaster in Nigeria is characterised by a vicious cycle of violence involving the state, the multinational oil companies and lately, a group of indigenous armed youth in the delta creeks poised to disrupt the extraction and export of oil from their lands. Hence, the concept of petro-violence as used in this study implies the physical, psychological and ecological violence and

¹A measure of equality of wealth, indexed by country.

deprivation perpetrated against communities in the Niger Delta. It also extends to the allocation and management of the wealth that accrues from oil. Within this context of violence, incidents such as oil spills and their socio-economic and ecological consequences in the community are by no measure less violent than armed conflicts. Hence, oil spillage and other destructive practices in the oil industry such as gas-flaring,⁴ fall within the theoretical framework of petro-violence.

This violence stems not only from the centrality of fossil fuel in the political economy of oil-rich states, but also the extent to which modern society is “carbon-based” and oil-driven. As crude-oil assumes a strategic importance in modern lifestyles and in the operation of the global economy (thanks to the manipulative role of the global oil complex, and the disregard and underdevelopment of alternative sources of energy), the synergistic relationship between oil extraction and distribution on the one hand, and global economic viability on the other, becomes obvious. The dependency on fossil fuel has made the disruption of oil flow, even at a single source of supply, an important weapon in the hands of any opposition group or individual. In relation to the violence in the oil sector in Nigeria, Okemini (2006) asserts that criminal and militant groups in the Niger-Delta region have realised the aggregate impact of their disruptive activities, such as hostage-taking and blowing-up of oil pipelines on the global oil market and economy. As an important, and to some extent mystified, natural resource, crude oil profoundly transforms national and local oil matters to the global stage. It unleashes all types of violence: against the natural environment during exploration and extraction or through oil spillages and gas flaring; against communities whose means of livelihood such as agricultural lands, rivers and streams are contaminated; and against the youth and the general public who are economically marginalised and suffer increasing poverty and misery due to profound mismanagement of wealth by the ruling elite.

Oil Exploration and the Nigerian State

With a population of 140 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. A vast oil reserve was discovered in the country in 1956 and commercial production began in 1958, before independence 1960. The discovery of oil during British rule partly explains the colonial attitude of Shell D’Arcy (now Royal Dutch Shell), the first and biggest oil company in Nigeria. Most of the country’s oil reserves are located in the Niger River Delta region, one of the world’s largest wetlands which is full of biodiversity. Crude oil from the region is a blend of two types that are considered top grades, namely: Bonny Light and Forcados. These grades are in particularly high demand. The high market value of these grades of oil is due to their low-sulphur content, which can easily be refined into gasoline and diesel (Okonta and Douglas, 2001; O’Neill, 2007). The discovery of crude oil by Shell D’Arcy in the

⁴ Gas-flaring is defined as “the burning of gas in the field as a means of disposal either because there is no market for the gas or the operator does not elect (or cannot) use the gas for a non-wasteful purpose” (Nurakhmet, n.d).

Oloibiri⁵ oil field changed not only the economic landscape of the Nigerian states and its external relations, but also the social, economic and ecological fate of communities in the Niger Delta region. Nigeria has over 606 oil fields in the Niger Delta region, with at least 360 on-shores and 246 off-shores (Adebanwi, 2001).

With a proven reserve of 36 billion barrels of oil, Nigeria produces over 2.5 million barrels per day making it a major source for heavy consumers like the United States and the European Union (Booker and Minter, 2003; Energy Information Administration (EIA), 2005). China is also making frantic efforts to secure a measurable share in Nigerian oil exports for its booming economy. Nigeria's oil assumes a new strategic importance as countries like the United States try to reduce their dependency on oil from the turbulent Middle-Eastern countries. In response, the Nigerian government plans to increase oil production to 4 million barrels per day in 2010 (EIA, 2005). In addition to crude oil, Nigeria has an estimated 185 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves. Unfortunately, about 43 percent of natural gas resource is flared (burnt off instead of being extracted) due to reasons discussed later in this paper. As part of the oil infrastructure, there are over 5,001 kilometres of pipeline across the landscape of the Delta, linking 275 flow stations to various export facilities (Brume, undated; Adebanwi, 2001).

Oil exploration brought Nigeria a monocultural economy⁶ and the abandonment of the production and export of cash crops such as palm oil, cocoa and groundnuts, the major foreign exchange earners before the discovery of oil. Oil provides 20 percent of the Nigeria's GDP and 65 percent of its budgetary revenue (CIA, 2007). Today, revenue from oil accounts for 95 percent of Nigeria's total export earnings and 80 percent of its revenue (O'Neill, 2007). The concentration on the oil sector and the gross neglect of other sectors of the economy, especially agriculture, limits the ability of the country to be self-sufficient in food production. Major international companies produce oil in a joint-venture agreement with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)⁷. The oil multinational companies involved in the venture include, Royal Dutch Shell, which accounts for almost half of the entire production, Exxon Mobil about one-fourth, and ChevronTexaco accounts for one fifth of the total production (EIA, 2005). On the export front, Nigeria has six terminals for the export of crude oil. Five of these are owned and managed by major companies operating in the region. These include the export terminals in Forcados and Bonny under the operation of Shell, Escravos and Pennington terminal under Chevron and Texaco, Qua Iboe terminal under ExxonMobil, the Brass terminal under Agip, and the Bonny Island LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminal under the management of a state agency (EIA, 2005).

Paradoxically, Nigeria, the largest producer of crude oil in Africa and the eleventh producer in the world, has resorted to the importation of refined oil. This is due to frequent breakdown of the four refineries in the country⁸. About 310,000 barrels of oil are consumed in Nigeria every day. However,

⁵ Oloibiri is located in present-day Rivers State of Nigeria.

⁶ An economy that depends on a single commodity export.

⁸ There are four refineries in the country: two in Port Harcourt; one in Warri; and one in Kaduna. These refineries have a combined capacity of 438,750 barrels per day.

the four refineries in the country produce around 214,000 barrels per day out of their combined total capacity of 438,750 barrels (Egberongbe *et al*; 2006). This shortage in the domestic supply of refined oil has to be imported from countries that originally purchased the oil from Nigeria in its crude form. Acute shortage of petrol products for Nigerian consumers and the practice of importing refined petrol products have added to corruption and petro-violence in the country. Rather than bringing social and economic growth and development in Nigeria, the oil industry together with the institutions of the state have eroded 'community spirit' and social capital; brought untold hardship to the people, and ruin to the natural environment of the country. Besides, unsustainable approaches to resource exploitation and community relations have destroyed the foundations of traditional economy in the Niger-Delta. As Ukiwo (2009: 2) observed,

Oil industry [in Nigeria] has remained an enclave economy for 50 years with little or no linkages to the regional economy ... Surpluses derived from oil have not been ploughed back into transforming local agriculture and aquaculture, which still employ most of the population.

Community actions and efforts to seek redress both from oil companies operating in the region and the Nigerian state have led to unprecedented levels of sabotage, vandalism and insurgency. This circle of violence is what this paper refers to as petro-violence – another dimension of the oil resource curse in Nigeria.

Oil and Ecological Violence in Nigeria

Intensive exploitation of oil in Nigeria has caused great and even irreversible damage to the natural environment. Many exploratory activities were carried out without adequate environmental impact assessments as required by the law⁹. As Ken Saro Wiwa, the Ogoni-born environmental activist hanged in November 1995 puts it; the environment in oil-producing communities has been "completely devastated by three decades of reckless oil exploitation or ecological warfare by Shell... An ecological war is highly lethal, the more so as it is unconventional. It is omnicidal in effect. Human life, flora, fauna, the air, fall at its feet, and finally, the land itself dies" (Saro Wiwa, 1996: 42-3, cited in Human Rights Watch, 1999). Explosions from seismic surveys, dredging canals and contamination of rivers and creeks are among the grievous ecological violence of oil production in Nigeria. During oil extraction, various chemicals and contaminants such as drill cuttings, drill mud are released into the streams and rivers and this has disrupted the natural ecological balance in the Niger Delta region (Trade and Environment Data, 1997; Worgu, 2000).

Another major cause of environmental disaster in oil-producing communities in Nigeria is oil spill. Egberongbe *et al* (2006) categorises oil spills into four major groups: minor, medium, major and

⁹ For example, a Dutch biologist formerly employed by SPDC for two years as head of environmental studies revealed that: "There was/is a major problem with most of the environmental studies carried out in the Niger Delta, as they are carried out by Nigerian Universities or private consultancies, which have a generally low scientific level and little technical/industrial expertise" (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

disastrous. Minor oil spill involves the discharge of any amount of oil that is less than 25 barrels in inland waters or less than 250 barrels on land without any threat to public health and welfare. Medium and major oil spills involve the discharge of 250 to 2500 barrels on land, offshore or coastal waters. Disastrous oil spill, the most extreme form, is described as “uncontrolled [oil] well blowout, pipeline rupture or storage tank failure, which poses imminent threat to the public or welfare” (Ntukekpo, 1996 cited in Egberongbe *et al*, 2006: 5). Many communities in the Niger Delta region have experienced several incidents of disastrous oil spills since the inception of oil exploration on a commercial scale.

Some of the worst and reported oil spill incidents in the area include: the Escravos spill in 1978, which involved about 300,000 barrels; SPDC’s Forcados Terminal tank failure in 1978, which caused the spill of about 580,000 barrels; and the Texaco Funiwa-5 blow out in 1980, which caused the release of about 400,000 barrels into the ecosystem (*ibid*). The most disastrous spill in Nigeria occurred on January 17, 1980 when about 200,000 barrels (8.4 million U.S. gallons), spilled into the Atlantic Ocean from a Texaco facility and destroyed 340 hectares of mangroves (Human Rights Watch, 1999; Egberongbe *et al*, 2006). In addition, the Human Rights Watch (1999) and Egberongbe *et al* (2006) record the 1982 Abudu pipeline oil spillage of 18,818 barrels, and the 1998 Idoho oil fire incident that claimed about a thousand lives and the spillage of about 40,000 barrels. According to the national Department of Petroleum Resources in Nigeria (DPR), a total of 4,647 incidents of recorded spills caused the release of approximately 2,446,322 barrels (102.7 million U.S. gallons) into the environment between 1976 and 1996 (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Out of this quantity, about 77 percent of the barrels (over a million) were lost in the ecosystem, while a total of 549,060 barrels representing 23 percent of the total spill was recovered (*ibid*)¹⁰. Other sources in the oil industry show that more than 1.07 million barrels (45 million U.S. gallons) of oil were spilled in Nigeria from 1960 to 1997, besides this, the DPR reports that between 1997 and 2001, 2,097 oil spill incidents were recorded in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Given the conservative nature of the estimated number of oil spills in Nigeria, the actual numbers of incidents in the country are most likely higher.

Several factors are responsible for the incessant oil spillage in Nigeria. One is the lack of regular maintenance of oil infrastructures such as pipelines and tanks by the concerned groups (Worgu, 2000; Egberongbe *et al*, 2006). After many yeas of usage, rusted pipelines rupture, spilling thousand barrels of oil over the land and waterways in Nigeria. Such acts of neglect by oil companies have continued, despite the existence of legislations aimed at ensuring “good oilfield practice.”¹¹ Other causes of oil spill include sabotage by criminal and disgruntled elements in the society. Oil pipelines are vandalised in different parts of the country either as sheer sabotage against the Nigerian state and oil companies, or as part of oil bunkering and black market activities. Organised groups break and destroy pipelines to steal oil from such lines. Such criminal activities cause the country an estimated 300,000 barrels of oil per day (Human Rights Watch, 1999; Egberongbe *et al*, 2006). Besides, it contributes to environmental pollution through oil spillage and oil pipeline explosions (this is discussed further below). In all, 50 percent of oil spills in Nigeria are caused by corrosion of oil pipelines, 28 percent by sabotage, and 21 percent due to production operation (*ibid*).

The devastating impacts of oil spills on the environment and the socio-economic lives of villages and communities in the Niger Delta region are better understood when one realises that peasant agriculture is the most dominant economic activity in the region. According to the Federal Office of Statistics (F.O.S) “crop farming and fishing activities account for about 90 percent of all forms of activities in the area ... and 50 -68 percent of the active labour force are engaged in one form of agricultural activity or the other, including fishing and farming” (Worgu, 2000, p.4). For five decades, the Niger Delta communities have been impacted by the spill of millions of tons of crude oil. Oil spills destroy farmland and crops, artificial fish ponds used for fish farming, economically valuable trees and other income-generating assets, including rivers and aquatic lives upon which communities depend for livelihood. In effect, the livelihood of many of the 7 million people living in the Niger Delta is under serious threat. After the pollution of agricultural farmlands and rivers, many communities have become more vulnerable to food shortages, health hazards, forced migration and unemployment.

Gas flaring is a major environmental threat. Nigeria has an estimated 185 billion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserve, making it the seventh largest concentration in the world. Due to unsustainable exploration practices coupled with the lack of infrastructure for gas use in Nigeria, the country flares 43 per cent of the gas it produces (EIA, 2006). It is estimated that about two billion standard cubic feet of gas is currently being flared in Nigeria, and this accounts for about 20 percent of the global gas flare (ibid). Consequently, gas flaring in Nigeria contributes significantly to global warming. It causes serious ecological and physical damage to other resources such as land/soil, water and vegetation. Gas flares, often located close to villages, produce, “soot which is deposited on building roofs... Whenever it rains, the soot is washed off and the black ink-like water running from the roofs is believed to contain chemicals, which adversely affect the fertility of the soil” (Trade and Environment Data, 1997). Fortunately, a significant amount of natural gas Nigeria is being processed into liquefied natural gas (LNG) for export. For instance, Nigeria exports about 22 metric tones of LNG and 3.5 metric tones per annum of natural gas. As a result, the sector has earned the country over 3 Billion USD in revenues since 1999 when it commenced operations (*The Guardian* (Nigeria), 22 February 2007). Making natural gas a major foreign exchange earner is part of the efforts of the Nigerian government to end gas flaring in 2008.

Understanding Oil Pipeline explosions in Nigeria

The spate of oil pipeline explosions has added a new dimension to petro-violence in Nigeria. Although pipeline explosion is related to the problem of oil spill discussed above this phenomenon deserves a closer look because the pipelines that run across Nigeria create power and wealth on the one hand, and bring anguish and death to many on the other. According to the Pipelines and Products Marketing Company (PPMC), “Nigeria has a total network of 5,001 kilometres of oil pipelines, consisting of 4,315 km of multi-product pipelines and 666 km of crude-oil pipelines” (Brume, undated). The network of oil pipelines across the country connects 22 petroleum storage depots

strategically located in different parts of the country, the refineries at Port Harcourt, Kaduna and Warri, the off-shore terminals at Escravos and Bonny, and the four jetties at Okrika, Atlas Cove, Warri and Calabar (ibid). Oil pipelines are required to be buried about one metre beneath the surface along a 25-metre wide Right of Way (ROW) specifically acquired by the federal government for security and safety reasons (ibid). However, many pipelines are exposed either due to soil erosion or because it was not buried deep enough. An official account presented by Chris Brume claims that the ROW is regularly cleared by the host community on contract bases with the PPMC. Extra security for the pipelines is provided by surveillance provided by a joint team of PPMC, community leaders, police and indigenes (ibid).

Oil pipeline explosion is caused by several factors. Oil pipelines rupture due to wear and tear after being used for a long time to channel oil to different destinations. Many oil pipelines across Nigeria have been in use for decades without replacements (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Therefore, it is common that such rusted pipes leak oil and eventually explode into balls of fire. Besides this, the pipelines carrying different types of oil products are subjected to attacks for different reasons. Many of these attacks are sheer acts of sabotage and vandalism by disgruntled elements aimed at obstructing and disrupting oil production and distribution. Many groups use such attacks to show their disagreement and resentment to the Nigerian state and oil companies over the management of oil and oil wealth in the country. Other attacks are carried out by organised gangs working as part of oil bunkering networks. Such "networks of evil" have been traced to some insiders in various oil establishments in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Suffice it to note that incidents of pipeline explosion and vandalism, which was formerly confined to the oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta area is spreading to all parts of Nigeria where pipelines are laid. Despite some security measures, attacks on pipelines are on the rise. For instance, in 1999, Nigeria experienced 524 cases of pipeline rupture, 27 of which were due to wear and tear, while the rest, 497, were due to vandalism (Brume, undated).

Unfortunately, the incident of pipeline explosion resulting from any of the above factors is becoming more frequent and deadly. Leaking pipelines attract scores of people across the country. Usually, they attract poor and starving young Nigerians, who rush to the scene with receptacles to collect its gushing contents. Such groups use the opportunity to collect as much "free" refined petroleum product as possible. Some of them survive on such illegal activity by hoarding and selling the product in the black market. These groups pay with their lives when such pipelines eventually explode. Thus, the primary victims of pipeline explosion are the impoverished groups and the entire inhabitants of the area where the pipeline are laid. Unfortunately, statements from government and oil company officials dismiss the victims of pipeline explosion as "thieves", scavengers, "vandals," and "protesters." The country witnessed some of the most tragic incidents in 2006. For example, on 12 May 2006, an inferno in a ruptured NNPC pipeline from an import terminal around the Ilado area of Lagos caused the death of about 200 people (*The Guardian* (Nigeria), 14 May 2006). On 26 December 2006 hundreds of Lagos residents lost their lives in a similar incident amidst acute shortage

of petrol products during the Christmas season. In addition to the lives lost in the explosion, 40 vehicles, a dozen homes, including a mosque and two churches as well as many businesses, comprising auto mechanic workshops, a saw mill and network of timber shop were consumed by the inferno (*The Guardian* (Nigeria), 27 December 2006).

The alarming rate of pipeline explosions in Nigeria either due to lack of maintenance, negligence or vandalism, depicts social and economic malaise facing the country. On the other hand, the disproportionate involvement of youths and children in these unfortunate incidents underscores the ugly relationship between them and the oil complex in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the struggle between these groups plays out in the pipelines. While some groups struggle to ensure unhindered flow of oil, others struggle to bomb the pipelines to disrupt the flow of oil and oil wealth. Unfortunately, the victims of the struggle for the control of crude oil in Nigeria are the natural environment and the impoverished Nigerians, who venture to make a living off this chaotic situation. The ecology is destroyed when oil spills, and hundreds of villagers, particularly youths, are killed by oil pipeline explosions. These are clear indications that oil resource in Nigeria has brought unequivocal curse to the country.

Use and Misuse of Youth Movements in Nigeria

Socio-economic and environmental injustices in the oil industry in Nigeria are perceived by many as directly harmful to the well-being of children and youths. As a result, many youths see the issue of oil resource control as that of justice and intergenerational equity. This reasoning has put many youth movements in the forefront of the struggle for justice and accountability in the management and distribution of oil wealth in Nigeria. The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) is an example of such leading youth groups in the Niger Delta region. The IYC was formed on 11 December 1998 with the issuance of the Kaiama Declaration. This statement outlined the environmental and economic destruction brought by unsustainable exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas in Ijaw and beyond (Onduku, 2003). While the IYC and many other youth groups in the region are focused on the quest for peace, justice and sustainable development, other armed youth groups have taken undue advantage of the volatile situation in the region to commit all types of atrocities thereby adding to petro-violence in Nigeria.

Organised oil theft or oil bunkering has contributed significantly to petro-violence in Nigeria. Rival armed youths in the Niger Delta fight over the control of territory and lucrative oil bunkering routes in the region.¹² Prominent among such violent groups are the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Dokubo Asari and the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV), led by Ateke Tom (Human Rights Watch, 2004). NDPVF and NDV are primarily composed of Ijaw youths who formed alliances with many other youth gangs for the control of bunkering routes. In addition, many of these armed groups

¹² Oil bunkering has been defined as "the illegal tapping directly into oil pipelines, often at manifolds or well-heads, and the extraction of crude oil which is piped into river barges hidden in small tributaries. The crude oil is then transported to ships offshore for sale, often to other countries in West Africa but also to other farther destinations" (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

pose as representatives of their communities and collect money from oil companies and the government. Again, these groups are involved in hostage taking of staff of oil companies, kidnapping and hijacking in the region. They are also being used by rival politicians and multinational oil companies to foment conflicts over traditional leadership positions and for personal political ends (Human Rights Watch, 2004). For these reasons, non-violent youth groups have been recruited as foot soldiers and thugs, thereby complicating the struggle for justice in Nigeria. However, it is imperative to note that youth militancy, which has become part of the overall petro-violence, is directly connected with the increasing level of poverty, underdevelopment and widespread youth unemployment in the country. Leaders of notorious youth groups are able to recruit large numbers who face extreme poverty and hardship. Many of these are educated high school and university graduates who are nonetheless ready to do anything to survive. Because of the high rate of unemployment for educated youths, most youth farmers and fishermen in many oil-producing communities are helpless because the lands and rivers they depended on have been rendered unproductive due to many decades of oil pollution. Unemployed youths are also being used by organised conglomerates involved in the illegal theft and sale of crude oil, or illegal bunkering. With youth unemployment running at 50 percent (*Vanguard* (Nigeria), 31 October 2006), few unemployed youths can resist the temptation of being misused by such criminal groups.

State-sponsored Petro-violence

Controversy around oil wealth in the Niger Delta region has been used by the Federal government to justify the massive militarisation of the region and engage in some of the worst human rights abuses in Nigeria. Hundreds of innocent youths have been massacred at the hands of the Nigerian military and security agents. Many of these interventions aimed at protecting oil infrastructure have had genocidal effects. For example, in November 1999, a group of youths were reported to have abducted six policemen and eventually killed them in the oil community of Odi. When the villagers failed to produce the miscreants after an ultimatum by the federal government, a ruthless military operation was carried out against the village. Under order of the president, the military used heavy artillery, aircraft, grenade launchers, mortar bombs and other sophisticated weapons against the community (Civil Liberty Organization, Nigeria, 1999).

The military invasion of the Odi community, contrary to the official objective of apprehending some criminal elements, caused unprecedented dismemberment of the civilian community. According to the leaders of human rights and civil society groups who visited Odi after the expedition, there was “mass burial, mass cremation and the disembowelment and mass dumping of corpses in River Nun. Two weeks after the operation, the stench of decomposing bodies dumped into various creeks could still be perceived from one kilometer from the town” (ibid). The Odi invasion, the report continued, destroyed crop farms, razed yam barns, food processing plants, canoes and “every house in the entire

community, with the exception of the First Bank, a Community Health Center and the Anglican Church, were burnt down" (ibid). The claim of many human rights groups that the objective behind the premeditated invasion of Odi was to ensure smooth production of oil by multinational companies was given credence by a statement made by General T.Y. Danjuma, then Minister of Defense. According to this federal official, "This Operation Hakuri II [i.e., the military invasion of Odi] was initiated with the mandate of protecting lives and property - particularly oil platforms flow stations, operating rig terminals and pipelines refineries and power installation in the Niger Delta" (ibid). The invasion of Odi, which violates both the constitution of Nigeria and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is another manifestation of petro-violence. It further demonstrates the extent to which human life has been debased because of oil and how disconnected the central government is from the oil-producing communities in rural areas. This translates to a lack of social capital, an essential ingredient required for community and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Social capital and Oil-resource control in Nigeria

Generally, oil-producing countries can be divided into two broad categories: those experiencing violence resulting from disagreement over the distribution of the resource; and those without oil-related conflicts. As Basedau and Lachor (2006) argue, these two groups have two distinct mechanisms of oil revenue distribution. The first is what they call a large-scale distribution mechanism, and the second is distribution through patronage networks (ibid). The Nigerian state falls in the latter group. Countries that distribute their oil wealth through the large-scale mechanism have succeeded in building enormous social capital which can bring all stakeholders together. As mentioned earlier, the failure to cultivate a significant scale of social capital, especially at the village and community levels, is because the major oil companies in Nigeria began operations with a colonial mentality. By so doing, oil companies failed to lay a cooperative and sustainable basis for operations.

To a large extent, "petro-capitalism" and other negative changes unleashed by crude oil and the "oil complex" in Nigeria have induced the formation of multiple youth movements, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Thus, oil exploration and its environmental and socio-economic consequences have served as a rallying point for youth movement and civil society activism. Among such groups are the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC); the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC); the Ijaw Youth Movement (IYM); and the Initiative for Non-Violent Change (INVC) in the Niger-Delta, to mention a few. The plethora of civic groups for environmental justice, civil rights and economic well-being of the region manifests the scale of social capital at work. Unfortunately, the Nigerian state and the oil companies have failed to take advantage of this large social resource for the transformation of the region. The development of oil communities requires the involvement of positive youth elements at the grassroots level through a collaborative partnership. The accumulation and coordination of existing social capital in the region through collaborative partnerships around oil resource and oil wealth management must be

approached from the bottom-up. The sustainable development of oil-producing communities and Nigeria as a whole require a three-dimensional dialogue involving the Nigerian state, oil companies, and oil-producing communities represented by aforementioned civil society groups.

While many oil companies recognise in theory the interrelationship of the three dimensions of sustainable development - corporate financial responsibility, corporate environmental responsibility, and corporate social responsibility - their activities have continued to negate the fundamental tenets of sustainable development. Based on their decades of experience in different parts of the world, the response of the major oil companies to the agitations of oil-producing communities in Nigeria has been incompetent and at best unclear. These companies can easily point to community development projects in their areas of operation as evidence of their concerns and corporate social responsibility. However, the amount of financial investments in the communities by the companies out of their total revenue from the region remains questionable. For example, SPDC spent 10 million USD in a year as a payback (or community relations) to the entire Niger Delta region that provided it with more than 5 billion USD in revenue in the same year (Okemini, 2006). This type of corporate mindset needs to change to carry the communities along and entrench sustainable development in Nigeria.

This study operates on the premise that political and institutionalised corruption and rentier politics are the culprits for petro-violence and abject poverty in Nigeria in general and among youths in particular. From 1956 to 2006, Nigeria earned 400 Billion USD as revenue from the 27 billion barrels of oil produced in the country (*Daily Trust* (Nigeria), 16 November 2006). Despite its large population, Nigerian governments have reaped sufficient revenue from oil and natural gas to drastically reduce the level of poverty and transform the country from a low-income to at least a middle-income country. The levels of waste, mismanagement and misappropriation that have characterised oil wealth at all levels of government in Nigeria cannot continue indefinitely. To transform Nigeria from a resource-cursed country to a resource-rich country requires a sustained diversification of the economy. This entails the use of oil revenue to develop key sectors and industries in Nigeria. Such economic policy action will have positive multiplier effects through job creation. In effect, the pressure on oil as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy will be reduced. Therefore, responsible government and the diversification of resource wealth in Nigeria are imperatives for reducing incidents of oil pipeline vandalism and explosion. Such diversification of the oil resource will consequently save the ecology of oil-producing communities, as well as impoverished people in these communities, from death, environmental contamination and health hazards.

The development of improved relationships between the three sectors of the Nigerian government, oil companies operating in Nigeria, and oil producing communities is not new. What is needed is the political will to strengthen and maintain these relationships to the point where organisations and projects draw from across the three sectors of the society, pooling their resources, knowledge and skills to jointly address complex socioeconomic and ecological problems. Previously, one or two of the sectors managed such social problems with little or no success. Crude oil and natural gas resources can be managed in a more ecologically friendly and socially responsible way

with inputs from all stakeholders, including the peasant farmers and fishermen in rural communities. In addition to this, the government and all its agencies, namely the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Pipeline and Product Marketing Company (PPMC) and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) should directly address the environmental, social and economic concerns of oil-producing communities by enforcing existing legislations guiding the extraction and distribution of oil and gas resources in the country. There should be better protection of oil pipelines through casing and electronic or satellite monitoring, as have been suggested in some quarters.¹³ Suffice it to note that, even with the application of sophisticated surveillance technology, the security of oil infrastructure cannot be guaranteed without the support and watchful eye of host communities. Therefore, the PPMC needs to devise a new pipeline monitoring strategy that will combine the above factors for maximum success.

Conclusions

Oil has played a major role in the degradation of the natural environment in the Niger delta and the Nigerian nation as a whole. While the implementation of good oil field practices remains the responsibility of oil companies, the management of wealth accrued from oil and gas resources remains the sole responsibility of the Nigerian state. Oil pipeline vandalism and the consequent explosion and deaths are sad reflections of institutional corruption, government insensitivity and decreasing value placed on human lives in Nigeria. Despite the illegalities and crimes involved in vandalising oil pipelines, such unlawful behaviours cannot be isolated from the political corruption of the Nigerian state and the petro-violence of the oil companies. It is not an overstatement to argue that such criminality was fostered by the Nigerian state and nurtured by oil companies. The management and control of oil and natural gas resources in Nigeria has been in the hands of the Nigerian state and oil companies, and so far, they have done an irresponsible job.

Through sustainable practices, collaborative partnership and development dialogue of all stakeholders, especially those in the oil-producing communities, Nigeria can use oil-wealth to kick-start the engine of growth by diversifying oil money in other strategic sectors, particularly, agriculture and manufacturing. It has become obvious that Nigeria cannot attain full development and realise its full potential by depending on the oil sector. However, oil wealth can serve as key for the enrichment and development of other sectors in the economy. This can be done in an environmentally sustainable way to ensure social and economic justice. For the country to alleviate poverty, create job opportunities and attain sustainable development in line with the United Nation's Millennium Development Goal of reducing global poverty, the development of entrepreneurship among its youths must be a priority. With the establishment of small and medium scale enterprises, the youths will contribute positively to

¹³ The idea of providing extra casing for the pipelines was suggested by the former governor of Lagos state, Mr. Bola Tinubu.

the economic growth of the country. However, the above sequence and development strategy requires a proactive ruling elite and a government that can sustain coherent social and economic policy processes.

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