

THE IMPACT OF OIL EXPLOITATION ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIVELIHOOD OF ILAJE-UGBO PEOPLE OF ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The oil producing areas of the Nigeria's Niger Delta remain increasingly under threat from rapidly deteriorating economic and environmental conditions as well as social tension. This situation culminated in the perennial conflict and violence that have characterized the region. This paper examines the socio-economic impacts of oil exploitation on the area of study. Methodology adopted to elicit data includes direct observation, focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interviews and review of extant literature. The paper concludes that prospects for the development of the oil producing areas would require a critical policy review. Any effort to eradicate poverty in the oil producing areas must seek to revive and revitalize the traditional economic activities. Providing viable employment opportunities for the people, particularly the youth, and channeling their energies into the development of sustained livelihoods as well as natural resource management activities can reduce current tensions and conflict in the oil producing areas.

Key words: Oil impact, local economy, Environmental degradation, Sustainable livelihood,
Niger Delta, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In the pre-colonial era, the people of the oil-producing areas of Ilaje were actively engaged in three main economic activities, namely fishing, local craft and trade in which they derived their livelihood. This was the backbone of their local economy. However, the major basis of economic growth in the pre-colonial period was fishing. Fishery constituted the mainstay of the economy as a result of the availability of numerous rivers, creeks and lagoons where fishes were caught in abundance and adequate rainfall. This sector provided high employment for the population. Farming was not common in the area. Fishing remains the primary occupation and means of sustenance of the people, even after the emergence and subsequent dominance of the hydrocarbon industry.

Local craft included weaving of fishing materials for the fishermen which constituted over 80 percent of the population. The fishing materials were significant articles of trade. Mat-weaving, canoe-making and local salt making were also prominent local industry. Local salt was produced because of their proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. This had collapsed since the colonial period when the British substituted the trade in local salt for the imported European salt.

Trading activities involved the selling of fishes, woven materials within and outside the area. These goods were taken to the Mahin markets and the local government headquarter at Igbokoda for sale or other towns in Ondo and other States of Nigeria. Other miscellaneous economic activities included timber felling, distilling of local gin (Ogogoro) and commercial water transportation. All these products were sold throughout Yorubaland. Their economic activities helped to foster economic prosperity (Curmen, R.J.M 1937; Ilaje/Ese Odo LGA, 1988)

In the process of extracting oil in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta these past four decades, ecological devastation on the one hand and neglect arising from crude oil production on

the other hand, has left much of the Niger Delta desolate, uninhabitable and poor. One fundamental problem that faces the oil producing areas today is the degradation of its environment. The fact is incontrovertible that the environment of the Niger Delta has been intensely polluted with tragic consequences for the economy of the people and the totality of their quality of life.

There has been no concerted and effective effort on the part of the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies operating in these areas, to control the environmental problem associated with oil exploitation. Rather, oil producing communities have been facing social and ecological risks which have found expression in the people's struggle and the violence that have characterized the region in recent times. As Okonta, I and Douglas, O (2001:86) rightly observed, the oil companies operating in the areas have through negligence and cynical indifference, orchestrated a vicious ecological war in which the victims are the hapless people of the region and the land and rivers on which they have lived and thrived for centuries. From observation, focus group discussion (FGD) sessions and interviews, oil companies particularly Chevron, the major oil multinational operating in the study areas, have not conducted nor made public a single satisfactory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before commencing operation to determine what potential harmful effects their extractive activities have on the areas, much less find ways of preventing or at best minimizing such impact. Further, the people are not adequately compensated for the developmental and environmental problems associated with oil exploitation.

Considering the Niger Delta region sensitive and fragile ecosystem and in spite of the vast resource endowment, its immense potential for socio-economic growth and its contributions to the overall development of Nigeria, the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta remain increasingly under threat from rapidly deteriorating economic and environmental conditions as well as social tension. The situation remains the same today, while some critics would say it has worsened

(ANEEJ, 2004:13). The perception in the oil communities is that of government negligence while valuable ecosystems on which the people depend for their livelihood are devastated, until the situation degenerates into violence, which subsequently draws a disproportionate reaction from government that deepens the people's resentment and their alienation.

According to Bisina (2004:1), oil exploitation has become a curse for the people of the Niger Delta. They have suffered environmental devastation, economic poverty and constant conflict. To make matters worse, political consideration and greed on the part of a corrupt government have kept many of the earnings from these vast reserves from returning to the Niger Delta to help restore the region. The grim reality for the oil producing communities is a life of deprivation, poverty, environmental dislocation and increasing crime.

Therefore, as evidence indicated, oil exploitation has a serious implication on the immediate environment as it impoverishes both ecological and socio-economic environments causing land dereliction, deforestation, water and air pollution and so on. These ill effects have reached their tempo in the affected areas, and as a result, the quality of life is being eroded.

In spite of the damaging impact of oil exploitation on the environment and livelihood of the host communities, scientific data on the overall and long-term effects of oil exploitation on the area are only beginning to emerge (HRW, 1999; Nwachukwu, 1999; Aluko, 1999; Okonta *et al.* 2001; Ukeje, 2002; Onosode, 2003). Environmentalists and other experts have focused attention on the environmental degradation resulting from oil activities and a major bone of contention is the implication of the environmental impact on the livelihood of the people of the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta.

The importance of environmental sustainability cannot be overemphasized. This is fundamental to the people's welfare and development as their existence to a large extent relies on

subsistence endeavours, which depends on natural resources. They perceived their well-being as tied to their environment in terms of livelihood, health, vulnerability and the ability to control their lives.

It is highly imperative to examine the overall impact of oil exploitation on the local economy, in order to determine the extent of the impact on the livelihood of the people and proffer ways of achieving sustainable livelihood for the people, thereby cutting the vicious circle of poverty, preventing and managing the endemic social conflict, which it endangers in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta. While there have been many intricate poverty strategies which have been designed and implemented in the Niger Delta region, and while all these schemes have their own validity depending on the environment, the stark reality in the oil producing areas is that decade of these schemes and programmes, have not mitigated the crucial problems of exclusion and human deprivation. Thus, the number of such deprived people seems not to be decreasing.

As a result, more germane to the survival of the indigenous people is the danger of oil exploitation obliterating their source of livelihood, since they rely solely on their immediate environment for their survival. Hence, anything that alters their environment threatens their very existence. Oil exploitation has created life threatening ecological hazards and deterioration of health and social fabrics of the inhabitants of the oil communities. The implication is that the oil industry has exploited the ecosystems for resources beyond the level of sustainability (Ashton-Jones *et al.*, 1998). The ecological problem is a reality, which has to be tackled.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF OIL EXPLOITATION ON THE OIL PRODUCING AREAS OF ILAJE

Oil related activities have negatively affected the economic activities of the study area, which consequently accentuated poverty in an area, which prior to oil exploitation was seen as largely economically homogenous. Crude oil was first discovered in Nigeria at Araromi Sea-side Ilaje in 1908 and later at Ogogoro in 1952 even before it was discovered in River State in 1956. Chevron Nigeria Limited formerly Gulf Oil is the major oil company in Ilaje. Chevron started operation in Ilaje in 1962, but actual oil exploitation started in 1968 with Okan oil field. However, prior to the discovery of oil in the area, the rural economy of the oil producing areas was simple and generally met the needs of the people.

The area was blessed with a long coastline, extensive brackish and mangrove swamps supporting a wide range of fish species: Tilapia, Threadfins, Moon fish, Bony Tongue fish, Tiger fish, Catfishes, Sea catfishes, Snappers, Cray fishes, Sea Turtle, Lobsters, Sardines, West African Croakers, Mulletts, Mackerels, Razor fishes and many others. A large proportion of these fishes are derived from artisanal fisheries involving peasant fishermen. Fish farming forms the most dominant economic activity in the study area. Fieldwork data showed that 80% of the sampled population are engaged in fishing, mostly using traditional method. Most fishing is carried out on a small-scale basis by self-employed fishermen and women using wooden canoes and speedboat. However, commercial trawlers operate offshore. The people use net and all kind of traps for fishing. Smoking of fish is the main preservation method. Surpluses of what they produced are carried through the numerous rivers to be sold at Igbokoda, the local Government headquarter.

Other economic activities that are also income generating include forest products – timbers and non-timber forest products. The people harvest, process, transport and market timber products to neighbouring communities. Timber is used for canoe and canoe paddling carving. Non-timber forest products such as bamboo, raffia palm are used for the production of fishing gears, basket,

local gin and wine. However, oil industry activities have led to the depletion in the population of aquatic animals and thwart the growth of timber and non-timber forest product. Fishing, the lifeline of most of the people has been made impracticable and unprofitable as a result of incessant oil spillage, which pollutes streams and rivers. Oil spills became a perennial threat to the means of livelihood of the inhabitants of these areas. This affected their capacity to sustain themselves.

Pollution of coastal corridors and wetland is a recurrent disaster. The first victim of the oil activities of Chevron, the major oil company operating in Ilaje waterway, and the other oil companies are the fishing nets used in the creeks and streams. Oil spillage can destroys fishing nets worth several thousand of naira. The losses accompanying these are better imagined.

The fishes in the rivers and streams also received a lethal dose of oil, which effectively expels or destroys the fish population. Fishes can no longer be caught in the shallow waters and the creeks have been invaded by salt water. Tidal waves also help to spread the oil quickly through the mangrove, destroying forests and soil in their wake. Gas flaring has also become another major pollutant of the local oil producing communities. Oil spills and gas flaring can destroy whole fishing communities, reducing vital fishery resources, destroying fishing implements and terrestrial animals (Okonta et al., 2001:112). A key informant revealed that their tradition demanded that visitors should be welcomed with a cup of water and a fish dish.

This tradition is no longer tenable as a result of declining fishery output. Focus group discussants also alleged that some species of fishes such as Aso, Opodo, Eja Osan that were caught in the rivers and creeks, near vicinity of gas flares have become extinct, moving further into the sea. Further, shrimp and crabs affected by oil spills become inedible even when smoked. A woman leader in Ayetoro community, bitterly complained about the adverse effect of oil pollution on their economic activities. According to her, shrimps and crabs that have been affected by oil spills could

not be sold. Smoking the shrimps and crabs did not make them edible. This resulted in huge economic loss to her. Further, she lost all the eleven cows reared by both her and the husband as a result of contaminated water drunk by these cows. The farm, which used to support the whole community have been ravaged.

Findings indicated that the negative impact of oil exploitation has radically altered the economic lifeline of this once self-reliant oil producing areas for the worse. The quality of life of the average person in these communities has decreased.

The negative impact on the local economy has increased the level of poverty in these communities. In consequence, the standard of living of the people is very low. An indicator of an improvement in the standard of living is an increase in real income of the people. However, the income of the people has not increased, rather it has decreased. The expected revenue from fish sales would be affected thereby reducing the purchasing power of the artisanal fishermen. The implication is that economic activities, which are still on the subsistence level, have been adversely affected.

The table gives a summary of the Fisheries output of Ondo State from 1976 to 2006, which was derived mainly from the Ilaje coastal communities. (Table 1) There was a decrease in output between 1976 and 1987 and an increase from 1988 to 2006. However, field observation revealed that while the decrease from 1976 to 1987 can be attributed to the negative environmental impact of oil exploitation on the fisheries resources of the people, the gradual increase from 1988 to 2006 did not reflect the situation in the oil producing areas. The increase can be attributed to commercial fish production by the government, who built a Fish Terminal at Igbokoda, the L.G.A headquarter and affluent private individuals who practiced both artisanal fisheries and aquaculture. Fish

production by the local people is largely on a subsistence level using traditional implement. Captured fisheries by local fishermen have continued to decrease.

The dwindling catch of fishermen was also identified as a factor that might have accounted for the remarkable decline in the traditional economic base of the people in these communities. Key informants confirmed that the quality and quantity of catch had continued to decline within the last ten years. Incessant oil spills they complained had either killed fishes or forced them to migrate. This development was said to have discouraged many fishermen who in most cases abandoned fishing and migrated to the city to seek better opportunity. Those who stayed back in the area have to move deep into the sea in search of a good catch. Youth migrated to the urban areas in search of other means of livelihood. Therefore, the alteration which the people experienced within their productive enterprises was responsible for other dysfunctional traits that ramified in the oil producing areas.

Although, there is paucity of research on the effect of hydrocarbon pollution on declining fishery resources, however, some studies have examined the specific impact of oil activities on aquatic species. One of such study by Osuntokun (1999:155) noted that the pollutive impact of oil spill affects both water and land. This causes unquantifiable ecological devastation, destruction of marine life and consequently leads to socio-economic paralysis. Oil spillage constitutes the greatest havoc to fishing operation. Oil spills can kill large number of fish in a small area, while spills in the open sea or in large creeks in tidal areas disperse fairly quickly, oil spilled in freshwater swamps or affecting fishponds in forest areas is confined to a small area. The effect of a spill can destroy much of the livelihood of those affected in the freshwater swamp where fishing areas and fishponds belong to particular families. Another study by Snowden, R.J and Ekweozor, I.K.E. (1987) have shown that the chronic occurrence of minor spills can have greater detrimental effects

on the environment than the more visible, large-scale spillages associated with tanker accidents and blowouts.

On his part, Okonta et al (2001:111) observed that water pollution, soil and land pollution respectively result in the death of most aquatic eggs and juvenile stages of life of fin-fish and shell-fish and sensible animals (like oysters) on the one hand while on the other hand agricultural land contaminated with oil spills become dangerous for farming, even where they continue to produce any significant yields. The adverse effect of acid rain on rivers and surface waters is also significant. Fish and in particular their eggs and juvenile forms are especially susceptible to increase in acidity, decreasing their population or wiping them off completely.

Moreover, various harmful and toxic organic compounds when introduced into the natural environment during oil extraction such as during seismic work, oil spills, gas flares and several other forms of pollution change the geo-chemical composition of the rivers and other components of the environment. Oil producing communities complained about the effects of these effluents on fish stocks. All these changes combined to affect the economic activities of the people, leading to a drastic decline in output. The people are very reactive to these changes because of the unavailability of modern fishing techniques to meet the challenges of declining marine resources. Resource depletion has far reaching multiplier effect and its importance is underscored by communal agitation and high national poverty statistics. It is imperative to evolve stringent measures to checkmate the eclipse of our collapsing life supports.

Other studies by the Niger Delta Environmental Survey have discovered that the toxic properties of hydrocarbon can lead to immediate death of aquatic life and seabirds, lobsters, fish and crab. Those that survive the spill would have ingested ample oil, which would make them taste oily when eaten. The medium and long run effect is that the means of sustenance of these

communities become paralyzed. This implies that contamination of rivers and creeks that form sources of water to fish farm and even the flooding of the fish farms due to overflow of water bank and erosion leads to massive killing of fishes and shell fish. Where the contamination effect is sub-lethal, smelling and tainting of fishes that command low market values are produced. These problems frustrate fish farmers out of business due to inability to pay back loans and the extra expenditure spend on cleaning up the oil.

Whittle (1978:403) in a study of oil pollution on marine fish brought into clearer perspective the various effect of oil pollution on fishery. According to him, the interference of oil-related activities on fishing operation can be a more or less continuous feature. One of such interference occurs at an early stage in the development of oil fields, when seismic investigations are underway. The use of explosive in such work can cause ecological disturbance and in the worst case can kill fish. A second aspect of interference that probably creates the greatest frustration is the existence of oil-related debris. A great variety of items have been found but the bulks consist of ropes, cables, chains, anchors, fenders, drum and buoy. Some of these can float and endanger navigation, while others sink and damage fishing gear on the bottom.

Another effect of oil on fishery resources is tainting, a change in the characteristic smell or flavour. Tainting may be due to oil taken up by the tissues or contaminating the surface of the catch, and can be caused by crude oil, petroleum products, refinery effluents and waste from petrochemical complex. Light oil and the middle boiling range of crude oil distillates are the most potent sources of taint, but all oil fractions from petrol to heavy boiler fuels can be implicated. The tainting problem is serious and at its worst it can bring severe financial hardship to individual fishermen. However, the most long-term impact of oil on fishery is the toxic effects. On the continental shelf in the more open water, large oil spills may cause egg and larval mortalities. The

major impact is, however, felt on the shallow coastal and intertidal areas and this may last for years. The formation of a film of oil on water bodies effectively prevents natural aeration thereby resulting in the death of organisms trapped below the water surface. Fish may also ingest spilled oil directly or indirectly, becoming unpalatable or even poisonous.

Findings have proved that the inhabitants of the oil producing areas of Ilaje who depended on the rivers and the outlying farmlands for their livelihood suddenly found themselves trapped in a ravaged environment that could no longer provide them with succour. The fishes have died in the creeks and rivers because of the mixing of fresh and salt water and it takes fishermen two to three days to pull out to good fishing grounds. Before the negative environmental impact of oil extraction began to manifest, the people claimed they could even catch small fishes directly in front of their houses, but it is no longer the case. Crops have died and great stretches have become infertile due to water logging caused by the high muddy banks along the sides of the channel. The cost of living has soared in the area, and fish, an important part of daily nutrition in this part and obtained virtually for free in the once fertile rivers is now sold at mind boggling prices. Some catfish can be sold for as high as N1, 000 per one.

The ultimate effect of environmental impact of oil production activities is to catalyse a reduction in the standard of living of the people in the area of primary activities. The overall economic effects are extensive and include dislocation of traditional economic activities and associated livelihood pursuits as well as danger to human health. Expectedly, all the economic effects translate to perculiary effects, which can be measured in terms of reduced income and the loss of alternative uses of resources consumed by oil communities.

Another major effect with longer-term welfare implication is that each round of environment degrading activity tends not only to increase the incidence of poverty among

vulnerable groups such as farmers and fishermen and their dependents, but also involves intensified exploitation of existing natural resources such as timber and non-timber forest resources. For example, pollution of major fishing waters leads to massive exploitation of marginal fishing waters. The pressure on land as a result of oil industry activities also leads to the exploitation of marginal farmlands, over farming and deforestation, all of which result in a new wave of environmental degradation. In this way, a kind of vicious circle relationship between environmental degradation and poverty incidence is created, particularly in the face of inappropriate compensation programmes of oil companies, which do not provide for alternatives sources of livelihood for deprived fisher folks.

In the light of the foregoing, with the traditional economy constrained by environmental pollution and other negative oil industry related interventions, and with the modern economy closed to the youth on account of lack of access to employment and other economic activities within the oil industry, the people of the oil producing areas, particularly the youth have encountered nothing but frustration. Their action to redeem themselves has only been described as restive.

SOCIAL IMPACT OF OIL EXPLOITATION ON THE OIL PRODUCING AREAS OF ILAJE

Oil exploitation activities and the associated environmental impact have socio-economic impact as well, which serve as background for specific protests and violent conflicts. Oil exploitation has led to social dislocation in the oil producing areas. The oil producing areas is in a parlous state of development. Basic infrastructure of roads, housing, electricity, water, education, communication and health are very weakly developed relative to the wealth of the region. The people are without access to clean drinking water, sanitation services and are at risk from water

borne diseases. There is also very rapid decay and deterioration of physical infrastructure and social amenities. Also the rate of unemployment was found to be generally higher than in most other parts of the country. The pollution and increasing scarcity of renewable freshwater supplies also threaten human health and welfare.

Another fallout from the negative environmental and economic impacts is incessant intra and inter communal clashes leading to loss of lives and properties. These clashes are usually caused by competition over ownership of land where oil well are located, claim to oil companies' compensation and contracts. Further, the neglect of the oil producing communities have often angered them resulting in their militant youths venting their anger on oil companies personnel.

Celestine (2003:36) traced the cause of the negative social-economic impact of oil industry activities to the unequal exchange relationship between the state, the transnational companies and the people. According to him, oil producing communities have remained grossly socio-economically underdeveloped and pauperized amidst the immense oil wealth owing to systematic disequilibrium in the production exchange relationship between the state, the transnational companies and the people. Enormous money had been derived from oil export but the area has been subjected to severe land and water degradation, socio-economic disorganization, increasing poverty, misery, military occupation and bloody violence.

Oil exploitation, Owabukeruye (2000:8) further averred impacted most disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the oil producing areas, massively threatening the fragile subsistence peasant economy and biodiversity and hence their entire livelihood and very survival. In addition, oil producing communities have basically remained dependent and underdeveloped, persistently disempowered, socio-culturally marginalized and psychologically alienated. The wealth derived from oil resources exploitation and export benefit directly only the operators of the

oil industry and government. It has also ignited and exacerbated bitter and bloody conflicts between emerging interest group within the oil producing areas.

Therefore, the safety, security of life and property, health and livelihood of the people of the oil producing areas, has been adversely affected by oil related activities. The ecological devastation contributes to social and economic deprivation, further complicating the development situation. Findings revealed that people are suffering from malnutrition, lack of quality education, substandard housing facilities and general shortage of infrastructural facilities. Observation during fieldwork showed that oil exploitation has a pervasive impact on social life in the area. The most visible expression of pauperization of life is the dwindling of social life because of virtual lack of infrastructure like roads, waterways, telecommunication and utilities like electricity, inadequate educational and medical institutions, paucity of skilled manpower, sparse industrial establishment and so on (Omojola 2000; Fadahunsi 2001).

The oil producing areas lack access to safe drinking water, proper sanitation and sewage system. The drainage condition is very poor as the water covering the settlement at a level stage was stagnant. The water has a permanent sheen of waste oil on it with a generally brackish colour. Toilet was built on water and this water, which is the source of drinking water, is where waste from food and garbage is dumped. It is no wonder bad odour emit from the surface water. A respondent in one of the FGD sessions lamented on the health risk associated with the usage of the polluted water. According to him, the polluted water we drink resulted in sour throats, scratching of the body especially after heavy rain, which accelerate the flow of wastes from nearby pits into the streams.

Pollution arising from oil spillage has contaminated the water, which people used for drinking, cooking and bathing. The borehole provided by development commission (NDDC) in

the area is not drinkable. World Bank (1996) reported that health wise, women and children in the oil producing areas are more susceptible to diseases than men. The death rate among the children is extremely high when the air, sea, water and farmland are polluted, there is bound to be an outbreak of diseases. In the Niger Delta, there has been increased incidence of certain diseases like bronchial, asthma, upper respiratory track diseases, gastro-enteristic cancer and partial deafness, especially in children due to the noise from the flaring of gas, water pollution result in illness and death from water borne diseases. The most common water borne disease in the area is diarrhea and worm infection. Therefore, overall life expectancy in the area is on the decline.

A study on the potential health impact of oil pollution on women living near oil fields by Sebastian, M.S and Hurtig A.K. (2004:208) observed that such women exhibit symptoms such as skin mycosis, tiredness, itchy nose, sore throat, headache, red eyes, ear pain, diarrhoea and gastritis. Further, the risk of spontaneous abortion was also high among these women. A higher incidence of cancer was discovered among males and females in areas where oil exploitation had been going on for at least 20 years. Significantly elevated levels were observed for cancers of the stomach, rectum, skin melanoma, soft tissue and kidney in men and for cancers of the cervix and lymph nodes in women. For children, an increase in hematopoietic cancers was observed. Many children also have distended bellies and light hair, which are evidence of kwashiorkor, a protein deficiency syndrome.

However, as evidence indicated, the oil producing areas do not have access to quality health care services despite the health hazard associated with oil exploitation. A single health centre was found in the eleven communities visited. This health clinic located at Ilowo community was not well equipped with adequate medical personnel and medical facilities. The health and well being

of local people have been directly threatened, depriving them of the capability to meet their basic needs for food, water and shelter.

The oil producing communities lack virtually all basic infrastructural facilities that can make life meaningful. Electricity supply from the national grid is unavailable because most of these riverine and coastal areas were not connected to the grids, but depend on kerosene stoves and lamps, or private generators (for those that can afford it) for power. Also, the oil producing communities are littered with abandoned projects; secondary schools with uncompleted staff quarters, residential areas are grossly inadequate and poor state of other infrastructural facilities. The visible lack of basic infrastructural facilities, particularly health care amenities, was vividly represented in the assertion of a youth leader at Ayetoro community, that:

There is no good hospital to give quality health care to the community. At a point in time, government brought medical personnel to treat the whole community for just three days, which was inadequate in comparison with the poor health condition of the people.

Focus group discussants in Ilepete also explained that they depended on patent medicine dealers in their community for medical treatment, and if the ailment is very serious, they have to travel to Igbokoda, the LGA headquarter, Okitipupa and beyond.

The Nigerian governments have not made any concrete effort to develop the area. With the enormous wealth derived from the place, government negligence is quite unwarranted. The oil producing communities have always been associated with poverty and underdevelopment, as well

as classified as zones of high propensity for out-migration (Egunjobi 1986). The high rate of unemployment in the area is linked to the erosion of the traditional means of livelihood of the people. Individuals displaced from their land and water resources including their dependants often migrate to the urban centres in the hope of securing paid employment in the oil industry or other sectors of the urban economy. Unfortunately, production in the oil industry is largely skill and technology intensive, thereby reducing the ability of oil companies to absorb the largely unskilled migrant labour from the rural oil producing communities. While the active labour force in rural oil producing communities are depleted, there arose population pressure on the urban areas, swelling the pool of the unemployed youth, many of whom are university graduate, frustrated with decades of extreme poverty, underdevelopment and the lack of job opportunities. According to the community leader at Oroto community,

We managed to send our children to school to acquire education.

Upon the completion of their education, they are unable to get gainful employment. They are managing the fishing activities with us in order to sustain themselves.

However, some of the youth of the area have been employed by the oil companies on temporary basis. These youth have benefited from the oil companies practice of providing unskilled jobs for the local people in the oil industries. At the Opuekeba platform of Chevron in Ilaje visited, local men were seen working at the platform. They were hired to work in oil dredging, laying of oil pipes, security guard and so on. When interviewed, this oil company's employee explained that these jobs generated high wages, even higher than the income of workers in the civil services. Some of these youth who are still in school, upon getting a job with these oil companies drop out of school. The high rate of school drop out in the oil producing area is not only attributed

to these seasonal jobs the youth were able to get from oil companies, but also because the parents are unable to afford to send their children to school.

In addition, from the observation data, many women in these oil producing communities engaged in prostitution and other social vices as a livelihood or survival strategy. Motels were seen in some of the rural communities like Ayetoro and Awoye where these young girls engage in prostitution. The long-term implication is high vulnerability to sexually transmitted disease (STD) and HIV/AIDS. In the reckoning of the United Nations Development report on the Niger Delta (UNDP, 2006:316), the Niger Delta region has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS prevalent in Nigeria. Prevalence rates range from 2.3 percent in the Ilaje oil producing areas of Ondo to 12 percent in Cross River in 2003. (Table 2)

Oil industry activities also create social tension due to inadequate compensation for environmental degradation, neglect and deprivation. The crises that have bedevilled the Niger Delta region since the 1990s have been closely associated with the environmental question (Orubu, 1991:189, 2001:57). As World Bank (1999) has pointed out, the current compensation programme aggravates community relations in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta. The perception of the people is that the oil companies do not consider themselves accountable to the local people. Resentment of their marginalization in contrast to the value of the oil reserves has resulted in clashes with oil company personnel, federal police and military forces. Further, the issues of compensation payment have also been a major cause of intra and inter communal or ethnic conflicts. Such conflicts are also a result of competition for employment opportunities with oil companies and over land where oil wells are located. The youth of the oil producing areas are at the centre of these conflicts. These conflicts, usually violent have led to the destruction of lives and properties. The youth radicalized by years of unfulfilled government promises and their

inability to find gainful employment have resorted to violence and armed struggle. In the last decades, there have been several violent demonstrations by youth in the Niger Delta as this seems to be the only language that the government understands. The development is not in any way desirable as the youth are now getting tutored and socialized in the culture of violence rather than imbibing the culture of peace.

Another dangerous trend in the oil producing areas is the collapse of traditional values, structures and system that have held the communities together for thousands of years. In most of the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta, oil industry activities have led to the disintegration of societal values and loss of traditional authority. However, from observation, FGD sessions and interviews, traditional structure in the oil producing area is still viable even if the awe and respect accorded the traditional rulers and elders have diminished. In comparison with other oil producing States of the Niger Delta, elders are still respected and they can control their youth.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The oil producing areas of the Niger Delta is the richest part of Nigeria in terms of natural resources endowment. The area has large oil and gas deposit, as well as extensive forests, good agricultural land and abundant fish resources. However, the oil communities of Ilaje, like other Niger Delta communities, remain marginalized from the mainstream environmental, economic, social and political activities in Nigeria. Government, both Federal and State, failed to consider the interest and human rights of the grassroots producing areas. Rather, these arms of government

continue to exclude the grassroots people or their voices in any processes to garner development for the country. The government lacked the political will to enact and enforce stringent environmental laws to regulate the environmental consequences of crude oil exploitation in the Niger Delta. As a result of this grave negligence on the part of the government, oil producing companies continue with the wanton destruction of the ecosystem of the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta.

The people's effort at economic and ecological sustainability is being severely threatened. They experience fear that they will have to move to another location or face extinction in a land so mangled by the oil companies, that it can no longer support them as it once supported their ancestors. In spite of the area been richly blessed in abundant natural resources, their potential for development however remains unfulfilled and threatened by environmental devastation and worsening economic, social and political conditions. In these communities, poverty is severe and widespread. Poverty is prevalent among fishing communities using only rudimentary equipment and among farmers cultivating food crops. These groups lack food security and are highly vulnerable to environmental shocks. While the economic base (fishing and agriculture) of the people has been ruined as a result of oil industry activities, it has also grossly endangered their safety and security.

In addition to income determination, environmental pollution and degradation and lack of access to assets including basic education, clean water, diversified economy and healthcare delivery that hold keys to unlocking poverty's grip are other forms of human deprivation. Therefore, in the Niger Delta, marginalization and exclusion from the ownership of assets and lack of access to social amenities define poverty. It is only when and if development strategies address these factors holistically that the possibility of impacting the poor and reducing vulnerability is

guaranteed. Issues of environmental sustainability and poverty reduction must be tackled in the Niger Delta. There should be people-centred development agenda grounded in the region natural and human capital.

The people of the oil producing areas can no longer endure the gross social and economic infrastructural neglect, poverty, ecological catastrophes and other deprivation they are facing, despite their contribution to the development of Nigeria. Their response to the apparent failure or inability of successive Nigerian governments to protect the land and people from the hazards of hydrocarbon activities such as pollution, oil spillages, incessant gas flaring, human right violations and subsequent economic deprivation and impoverishment lies in the clamour for resource control. The people of the Niger Delta region strongly believe that the only way their developmental needs can be met is for them to regain ownership, control and management of their oil resources.

Against this background, the special circumstances in which the people of the oil producing areas find themselves require programmes that recognize that poverty eradication and successful rural development depend on the involvement of local communities. There must be a strong focus on strengthening grassroots organization and on making resources available for community development activities. The programme for addressing rural poverty must identify and target the most vulnerable, empowering them to participate effectively in development activities.

In identifying impediments to development, the argument is that what the central government does or fails to do in terms of human development and entitlements or in initiating programmes that will move these various capacities to increasingly higher height, provide adequate access to quality education, affordable healthcare and a reliable policy for environmental protection. In this context, where these are not guaranteed, poverty becomes a problem of injustice and undergirds inequality.

The government in concert with oil producing communities and other stakeholders should undertake a comprehensive environmental survey of the Niger Delta, establish the causes of ecological and socio-economic change over time. Government should induce appropriate corrective action by encouraging relevant stakeholders to address specific environmental and related socio-economic problems identified in the course of the survey, in order to improve the quality of life of the people and achieve development in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta region.

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