
NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGER DELTA
AREAS OF NIGERIA FROM 1957 TO 2020

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Abstract

This paper is a discussion on the negative effects of oil and gas explorations whose poor and unprofessional handling have greatly damaged the natural environments of the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria. Abandoned in such miserable conditions created by uncontrolled and deliberate pollution of the environments and communities within the Niger Delta, human lives are exposed to great risks, while plant and aquatic lives suffer severe complications, which expose host communities to terrible challenges, most especially food insecurity and loss of economic sources of wealth creation. Using the qualitative research method therefore, it becomes the major target of this brief paper to identify and discuss some of the key negative effects which the poor handling of environmental pollution matters have exposed the affected areas to. It goes on to underpin the unprofessional activities of oil and gas conglomerates operating in dealing with issues of environmental pollutions in the Niger Delta as being responsible for the epileptic pace of infrastructural developments faced by affected communities within the region. Starting from 1957

when mining and exploration activities commenced in earnest in the region, no single host community has been left untouched, with the effect that numerous health challenges are encountered by the people, while normal aquatic lives suffer severe complications. These are in addition to the job losses, and destruction of economic wealth suffered by the region, which exacerbate the proliferation of criminal gangs and consistent pipe-line vandalizations within the areas. At that, it becomes suggestible that the various operating conglomerates which are licensed to engage in oil and gas exploration live up to their social responsibilities to their host communities, contribute to national development, and account for any reckless acts of environmental pollutions that emanate in the course of their mining activities.

Key words: Development, Environment, Niger Delta, Pollution

Introduction

The history of Niger Delta area's encounter with environmental pollution could be pinpointed down to the historic commencement of commercial oil exploration in December, 1957. This historic engagement was synonymous with the beginning of intensive official oil mining activities by the consortium of the Royal Dutch Shell and the British Petroleum in the Niger Delta. Prior to this development, both companies had engaged in active reconnaissance and exploration activities in Nigeria for about twenty years, during which time the expectations of discovering oil in commercial quantities in Nigeria still remained shaky and quite insignificant (Eze, 2016).

At that time, there was no expectation that Nigeria would one day turn into an oil exporting nation. However, the scenario turned round and oil production increased dramatically at the completion of the Bonny Oil exporting terminal, followed by the connection of a network of pipelines to oil fields in other parts of the Niger Delta, even as far as the present day Edo and Delta States (Kirk-Greene &

Rimmer, 1981; Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997). History informs us that the story of the search for oil in Nigeria started in 1937 when the foremost hunts for this liquid mineral began. The continued search for mineral never yielded any fruitful reports until 1956 when the first discoveries of oil deposits were made. After this historic discovery, the Federal Government granted an oil prospecting and mining license to Shell-BP in 1954. At that, the first shipment of crude oil out of Nigeria's shores was made in 1958. Ever since then, Nigeria has been actively involved in exploration and exportation of oil as a major source of revenue and export trade, which effectively positioned this natural mineral as a major economic backbone and foreign exchange earner for the country. Following this development, Nigeria became a major oil exporter to the international market. At the moment according to Aniche (2016), Nigeria has more than 35 billion barrels of oil reserve, and has been ranked the eleventh largest oil producing nation in the world, and the second largest producer in Africa at an average of 2.3 million barrels of crude oil per day. This view is supported by OPEC (2012), with the claim that Nigeria remains the 8th largest exporter of oil at the global level at an average production capacity of 2 million barrels per day.

Meanwhile, the oil boom of the 1970s strengthened Nigeria's dependency on petroleum as a single source of revenue, all at the expense of agriculture which sustained the nation's economy from the earliest days of political independence in 1960. Even though the oil boom era also consolidated and financed the country's war recovery efforts, most especially in her attempts to reconstruct and rehabilitate damaged critical public infrastructures, its negative impacts need to be noted too. The announced oil boom increased the appetite of the Gen. Gowon's government to spend so recklessly without adequate policy guidelines. It reduced the quality of public spending and rather shifted the attention of the government to embark on projects which were less relevant for genuine development. More so, the intoxications of the oil boom era created high level inflation in the country, skyrocketed poverty indexes, and increased the hunger to loot public funds by government officials. This leads our source to conclude that the era succeeded in throwing

transparency and accountability by public officers to the winds, while reckless spending of public funds were positioned to occupy the driver's seat (Ezirim, 2010).

However, it is relevant to add that the country's continued reliance on this liquid gold as the singular backbone of the nation's economy even into the 1990s gradually turned into a delicate game which continued to boomerang. Revenues from Nigeria's export of oil petroleum alone accounted for 96% of her export revenues, and consequently rendered agriculture less relevant. Agriculture which was the backbone of the nation's economy from its independence year of 1960 was downgraded. With attention shifted to the oil dollar economy, government's interest and commitment to the development of agriculture dwindled, with the effect that inflation and food insecurity became prevalent all over the country (Kirk-Greene & Rimmer, 1970; Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997; Ezirim, 2010).

The implication was that Nigeria's dependence on oil revenues as the primary source of revenue and foreign exchange earner made enormous influence on the level of environmental pollution recorded in the Niger Delta areas since this mining activity took a very commercial dimension. Depending solely on the export of petroleum products, without any serious attempts to diversify the economy and engage vigorously in other areas of the economy such as agriculture, contributed significantly to the creation of severe environmental pollution in the host communities of the Niger Delta where oil mining activities were conducted over the years. At that, Nigeria lists among the six highest producers of oil worldwide, with a GNP of about \$35 billion (\$460 per head) and a growth rate of 6-7% a year. Our source confirms that as her oil export business got to its peak between 1974 and 1976, oil production exceeded 2 million barrels per day. That was the era of the historic oil boom in Nigeria when reckless spending by the military government, as well as high level inflation hit the nation (Calvocressi, 1987; Ezirim, 2010).

Meanwhile, as the activities of oil exploration intensified, so did the spread of environmental pollution, environmental degradation, destruction of natural farm lands, erosion of communities, destruction of community lives, loss of revenues, job

losses among host community members, increased criminality, and devastation of the entire aquatic life. At that, numerous healthcare challenges glared the members of the various communities in the face, a situation which amounted to loss of precious innocent lives. These were the plights and predicaments of oil rich communities in the present-day Rivers State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, AkwaIbom State, Delta State, Edo State, Imo State, Anambra State, and Ondo State (in the southwest part of Nigeria), which constitute the present day comity of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is these states that bear the brunt of the unprofessional and lousy oil mining activities of the multinational corporations that have been engaged in the business of harvesting the nation's rich oil resources from below the ground levels (Emerole, 2011; Nzeadibe, 2015).

As a matter of fact, a number of multinational companies were involved in the oil mining activities within the region. The list includes the following: Chevron (Nig) Limited, Mobil Oil Producing Company of Nigeria, Nigeria Agip Oil Co., Elf (Nigeria), Texaco Overseas (Nig), Delta Oil (Nig), Demanex (Nig), Henry Stephens and Sons, Japan Petroleum (Nig), Tenneco Oil Company of Nigeria, Ashland Oil Company, Pan Ocean Oil Company, and the Federal Government-owned Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). According to these sources, in 1974, the Federal Government of Nigeria acquired some interests in Elf, Agip/Philips, Shell BP, Gulf Oil, and Mobil Oil, which were increased to 55%. In 1975, government's interest holdings were also extended to Texaco, while Pan Ocean followed in 1978. These were the situations until 1979 when government's participation got to 60% interest licenses on land, and 40% in offshore blocks in all the oil companies listed. Meanwhile, the British Petroleum's interest in Shell BP was also taken over by the Nigerian government in 1979, while it was renamed African Petroleum (AP) (Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997).

However, it might be important to indicate that Nigeria counts among the richest nations of the world and richly endowed with abundant wealth of human and natural resources. Apart from oil, the land is richly blessed with several other mineral resources, several of whom are yet untapped. From the abundance of these huge natural resources, the country earns fat foreign exchange. The great

irony of the whole exercise is that high level corrupt at the various levels of power in the country, political manipulations, selfishness of persons of power, economic sabotage, and mismanagement of public funds continue to deny the ordinary citizens the opportunities of benefitting from the huge incomes generated by the nation's natural resources. Mindless diversion of public funds into unexplainable bank accounts, looting of treasury by political office holders, as well as the attitudes of pen-robbery have continued to keep Nigerians below the poverty levels, increase levels of environmental pollution, and deny oil rich communities of Nigeria the opportunities of developing at some reasonable speed (Calvocoressi, 1987).

As was the case, the Nigerian government did not just fold her hands, while the natural environments were damaged through forms of pollutions. A number of government policies, laws and regulations were created to function as platforms to protect the environment, control abusive damage, checkmate the activities of oil mining conglomerates, as well as make the natural environments habitable and conducive for life and living. For the purposes of clarity, a few major ones shall be mentioned here, which include the following: the Federal Government Protection Agency (FEPA) Decree 58, which was passed into law in Nigeria in 1988. This agency was saddled with the duties of working out modalities on how to handle the environment. Further to this development, Isife (2012) observes that prior to the development there were other laws and acts of government created by previous governments to protect the environment. These included the following: Mineral Act of 1969, 1973, and 1984; the Oil in Navigable Water Decree of 1968; Associated Gas Injection Act of 1969; and Chad Basin Development Act of 1973.

Further to these policy developments, Eneh and Agbazue (2011), in Isife (2012) report authoritatively that "these Laws and/or Acts were promulgated to address specific and identified environmental problems. They were narrow in scope and spatially restricted." They add further that, for instance, Decree 58 of 1988, as amended by Decree 59 of 1992, which gave birth to the Federal Protection Agency (FEPA), now the Federal Ministry of Environment,

empowers the agency to have control over all issues relating to Nigeria's environments, its resources, exploitation, and management. However, this source concludes with regret that "despite the legal backing and funding, which FEPA enjoys from Federal Government of Nigeria, the level of success so far recorded by FEPA is a far cry from her set objectives and goals. This is because the rate at which the environment is being degraded is growing worse than what it was before the establishment of FEPA."

Thus, the prevalence of these ugly environmental narratives in the Niger Delta could be attributed to the reckless and unprofessional nature of the mining activities of the oil companies involved. Obviously, these manifest themselves in the level of environmental pollution exacerbated on the various host communities of the oil rich communities of the region. These reflect on the level of under-development, lack of commitment to the principles of social responsibility, unprofessional handling of mining activities, as well as the improper management of waste products by the various mining companies involved (Iwunna, Dimonye, Njoku, Okoro & Nkwocha, 2020).

These poor and unprofessional attitudes leave a number of questions unanswered. They expose the professional competences of the mining firms engaged in the exploration activities, as well as question their abilities to do justice to their social responsibilities to their host communities. The ugly consequence of these shabby responses to serious environmental pollutions, which are aggravated by abject lack of professionalism in the handling of mining activities expose the Niger Delta areas to great dangers which adversely affect both human and aquatic lives. Faced by such environmental dangers, which are exacerbated by excessive pollution, disease spread becomes rampant, even as human and aquatic lives suffer severe damage and irreparable complications. These have been the unfortunate fate the host communities in the Niger Delta areas since commercial exploration of minerals commenced in the region 1957 till date.

Thus, it is the target of this brief paper to underpin the key negative effects which the continued pollution of the Niger Delta environments landfalls on the affected areas. This paper also seeks to examine the various implications which the reckless activities of

environmental pollution exacerbate on health and living conditions, as well as the economic livelihood of the peoples of the affected communities. At that, it becomes one of the primary objectives of this text to identify environmental pollution as one of the major factors which impact the poor infrastructural development of the region. Based on this understanding therefore, the reckless activities of environmental pollution perpetrated by the various oil conglomerates licensed to operate in the region affect the poor infrastructural development, as well as exacerbate the growing health complications experienced by the affected host communities (Isife, 2012).

Environmental pollution as a national catastrophe

From Lagos to Edo State, AkwaIbom to Bayelsa, Abia to Katsina, and from Rivers to Sokoto State, the story of environmental pollution is virtually told everywhere and in all corners of the country. The ugly and disastrous footprints left by this menace in parts of Nigeria leave terrible sights in the eyes of communities that witness the occurrence of these incidents. In virtually all parts of the country, narratives of environmental pollution have been told with enormous sighs of regret and helplessness. In each of these occurrences, natural environments suffer tremendous damage. Human health is put at great risk. Diseases spread recklessly. Agricultural produce are lost. Economic livelihood is destroyed, while incidents of joblessness are regrettably recorded among citizens of affected communities (Iwunna, et al, 2020).

In the midst of these environmental pandemics, it is no longer news that Nigerians dispose their domestic wastes indiscriminately. At that, it is not strange that Nigerian families discharge their domestic wastes into public water channels, gutters, sewage systems, rivers, market places, and other public places where such wastes create terrible stench, dirty the environs, block constructed drainage systems, and even render parks and public places unusable. Without doubt, these human activities cause the spread of diseases, thereby making the lives of affected community members a living hell on earth. The World Health Organization (WHO), in Igwe (2012), confirms that “a quarter of the diseases facing mankind today occur

due to prolonged exposure to environmental pollution.” This leads this author to the conviction that “improper management of solid waste is one of the main causes of environmental pollution and degradation in many cities, especially in developing countries.” This is a clear indication then that greater majority of Nigerian towns and villages are victims of this heinous crime.

In Nigerian communities, the culture of open defecation is still being practiced. In this 21st century, some Nigerian families lack necessary toilet facilities. In such homes, houses are constructed without installing toilets and other sanitary facilities. Within such homesteads, there are no provisions for house members to do their toileting in some decent ways. At that, there are no pit latrines. There are no water-system toilets too. Faced with these challenges, members of such homes resort to toileting openly in the bushes and agricultural farmlands around their homes. These activities obviously impact the health conditions of community members, as diseases spread faster through the agencies of the flies that feast on such unwholesome human deposits. On the part of the government, the various ministries and agencies in charge of environmental protection have created a number of policies and regulations which have been designed to reduce or even eliminate this ancient practice. In some communities too, communities and women organizations have constructed public toilets in strategic places, all with the intentions of improving sanitation and discouraging attitudes of open defecation (Igwe, 2012; Isife, 2012; Nzeadibe, 2015).

Similarly too, Nigerian churches, and mosques have been guilty of terrible pollutions in their own various ways, through some reckless use of the public address system. As unenviable partners and participants on environmental pollution in towns and villages, these worship centres often raise the volumes of their public address systems far above the government approved noise limits. In 2009, for instance, the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA) pegged the noise levels at 55 decibels during the day and 45 decibels at night. According to Uzundu (2012) and Contra Culture, 2012), in Igwe (2012), “this demand was based on scientific evidence that continuous exposure to noise levels above 85 decibels in the day can lead to hearing impairment and other health problems.

Experts say it can raise blood pressure, increase heart beat rates, result in headaches, loss of concentration and reduce quality of work and service.” These sources then conclude regrettably that “unfortunately, in Nigeria, noise level reaches as high as 90 db and beyond, even in residential quarters.” Without doubt, these environmental noise pollutions expose Nigerians to great danger. Other areas of environmental pollution which have also gone viral in Nigerian towns and villages is the indiscriminate felling of trees. Records show that Nigerians usually cut down trees unnecessarily, without official approvals, and without any plans to replace same. Some of such trees are several centuries old, and planted by the past generations our ancestors. For flimsy reasons of making economic gains, precious trees which protect the environment, provide shed to homes and persons, provide food, fertilize the environment and make them suitable for farm work, as well as supply the much needed oxygen for the good health of man and animals, are cut down with a wave of the hand in exchange for a few Naira notes.

Meanwhile the perpetrators of these activities make no plans to plan new trees in replacement of the cut ones. Abandoned in such terrible states, communities suffer several floods during the rain seasons, and terrible devastations of winds and hurricanes too. These attacks of nature destroy lives, farmlands, and create trails of destruction of the natural habitat. At that, drought and excessive food scarcity emerge, even as deforestation, desertification become eminent too. Meanwhile, population growth in communities goes on uncontrollably (Isife, 2012; Iwunna, et al, 2020).

The list of areas where Nigerians have contributed massively to the environmental headaches the country is passing through at this time is just lengthy. Some Nigerians deliberately choose to flout the relevant environmental laws which are designed by the federal and state governments to protect and safeguard our environments. For instance, it is simply strange that Nigerians still erect houses on unapproved plots of land, without making any attempts to obtain the necessary official permits. Obviously, such poor attitudes endanger the safety of security of human lives, property, economic livelihood, and the natural environment. It is not strange too that

Nigerians erect residential and commercial structures on top of government approved drainages and water channels, without obtaining necessary approvals, thereby blocking the free flow of water. The ugly effect of this development is that numerous uncontrollable channels of erosion are created as a result, while homes, economic livelihood, valuable property, human lives, and public infrastructure are damaged, washed away, or even permanently lost as a result (Nwafor, 2006).

Often, the news media in Nigeria have reported several cases of devastating flooding in different parts of the country. In each of those cases, precious lives were lost. People's sources of livelihood were swept away. Public infrastructures such as roads are destroyed. Homes and shops were destroyed, while farmlands were completely bulldozed. For instance, the DailySun newspapers report on August, 23rd, 2017 indicates that six lives were lost, while several families were displaced during an incident of flooding which took place in Lokogoma District, in the Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The unfortunate victims included three members of the same family who were swept away in their vehicle. The report adds that several communities in the FCT are currently facing the threatening dangers of flooding, as residents now sleep with both eyes closed (Itua, 2017). Nigerians are also in the habit of erecting structures under high tensions electrical installations, without obtaining any approvals from the various offices of the government. These ridiculous acts of negligence endanger lives, expose crucial public infrastructure to great danger, destroy aquatic lives, and expose occupants to cancer and other serious ailments. Most importantly, such illegal structures deface the environment, create unnecessary overpopulation of cities, exacerbate the growth of poverty and criminality, as well as threaten food security among residents of affected slums (Nwafor, 2006; Uduji, Edicha & Oyaka, 2012; Iwunna, et al, 2020).

We have just cited a few instances. Because of space constraints, we cannot mention more. However, it is a known fact that the question of environmental pollution has since graduated to the levels of a national calamity. Every Nigerian experiences it in one way or another. Most Nigerians are partakers and active participants. Some Nigerians reap cash and material benefits from

this indescribable menace, which are easily observed in most towns and cities of Nigeria. Their effects are simply crippling and detrimental to effective infrastructural and human development, as the case of the Niger Delta's air, water, and land pollutions shall illustrate. For purposes of clarity however, the WHO (1990) considers the concept of environmental pollution as a "situation in which the outer ambient atmosphere contains materials in concentrations which are harmful to man and his environment."

Effects of environmental pollution

Obviously, oil exploration activities by the multinational conglomerates that were licensed to operate in the Niger Delta have left some indescribable footprints of woes. Without doubt, such mining activities create elaborate negative impacts on the region's developmental calendar, which have adversely affected the overall growth of the oil-rich host communities since oil mining activities started in the areas several decades ago. Even in these millennium years, the deplorable environmental conditions could not change much. It is therefore the primary focus of this segment to discuss briefly the various ways in which oil mining activities in the Niger Delta have contributed to setting the development of the region backwards and even crippled growth in some cases.

Indeed, oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria could be said to have succeeded in destroying the human and entire aquatic lives of the region. By these activities, mining companies operating in the region recklessly discharge unwanted and hazardous biological, chemical, and physical waste materials into public streams and rivers. Accordingly, Isife (2012) claims that the unprofessional disposal of those dangerous products into rivers and streams by the mining companies destroy aquatic life, contaminate the waters, increase diseases spread, as well as make the waters unhealthy for consumption by man, animals, and plants. The implication of this ugly trend is that such contaminated waters spread so fast and wide, beyond the immediate environments of the affected host communities. Within a short space of time, other water channels, streams, and rivers connected with those of the Niger Delta get contaminated and hazardous for life too.

Mining of crude oil by the conglomeration of multinational oil companies licensed to operate in the Niger Delta region has been responsible for the speedy deforestation activities faced by host communities whose lands and oceans house the nation's oil wealth. Owing to the deliberate, poor, and careless mining patterns adopted by the oil conglomerates, trees, plants, and shrubs die prematurely. The continued dislodging of acidic chemical wastes on farmlands, and forests within the region wipe away the flourishing lives of the region's forest areas, thereby exposing the entire environments to excessive erosion, uncontrollable flooding activities, even as affected rivers are filled up with unquantifiable amounts of waste products swept into the terrains as a result. This leads Isife (2012) to the contention that these activities deplete the quality of the soil, render the environment infertile, increase flooding, and eliminate the mineral contents of farmlands.

At the end of the day, communities become so dangerously exposed to terrible flood, and wind attacks. These lead to adverse food scarcity, unavailability of natural windbreaks, high cost of planks for roofing of houses, and lack of medicinal plants and herbs for the production of medicaments. More so, community members are kept out of jobs, loss of livelihood, lack economic power of their own, and consequently tempted to engage in criminal activities in an attempt to find alternative sources of survival and sustenance of their families (Udezo, 2007).

Most importantly too, such population explosions generate excessive solid material wastes, exacerbate the creation of unapproved dumpsites by residents, and provide fertile environments for the spread of diseases. In this era of the dreaded Covid-19 Pandemic therefore, uncontrolled population explosions created by the presence of unapproved shanties and slums in and around urban communities of Nigeria obviously impact the continued spread of this dreaded diseases among communities, most especially as the residents of such slums and shanties are largely ignorant of the spreading patterns of this disease, and could therefore see no reason to comply with the official regulations designed to control the spread of this disease which has already cost the country more than a thousand precious lives (Mohamedhai, 2020).

As well, petroleum mining activities in the Niger Delta have created elaborate population explosions of job seekers and all sorts of unemployed persons in the region. These emanate from the fact that the mere mention of the presence of an oil company in the midst of job seekers and the unemployed evokes serious sensation. Every single Nigerian would wish to work in an oil company. Every family would wish to secure jobs for the graduate kits and kin in an oil company. At that, there is a serious push among Nigerians to relocate to the town and communities which house those conglomerates. In the process, communities in the Niger Delta become highly overpopulated. Shanties and unplanned houses continue to emerge without relevant approvals. According to Isife (2012), environmental conditions in major cities such as Port Harcourt, Warri, Benin, Sapele, Aba, Asaba, etc continue to deteriorate as a consequence of the excessive population explosions recorded.

Faced with the enormous challenges created by the explosions in the population indexes, our source strongly argues that excessive pressures are made on the available social amenities and public infrastructures provided within the cities and shanty towns caught up in the population explosion quagmires. In their desperation to tackle these challenges, landlords and house owners are compelled to construct unapproved residential places, even under unauthorized areas such under high tension electrical wires, and dangerously close to electricity transformers. House agents and rental agencies hike the costs of their agency services, thereby inflating the cost of rents in these cities and communities. Consequently, environmental conditions in affected cities deplete so rapidly. Slums and shanties are created with speed. In the process, criminal elements secure residential places, with the effect that forms of criminality, armed robbery, drug abuse, kidnapping, and oil bunkering become phenomenally rampant. On the strength of these regrettable developments, Aniche (2016) is pressured to concede the presence of this liquid gold in the Niger Delta as “the devil’s excreta.”

From a similar perspective, Ezirim (2010) equivocally claims that ‘Nigeria is emblematic of the ‘oil curse’ or the failure to utilise oil wealth prudently.’ This source attributes the blames to the endemic

corruption and looting of public funds which have infected the country's politicians and peoples in power at the various levels of governance. These nefarious activities have obviously affected the development of the Niger Delta region. To that end, it is not strange that a number of politicians and political godfathers from the region connive with oil companies operating in the region to perpetrate and dump hazardous chemical wastes on farmlands, public streams, highways, and public spaces. These activities result into dangerously polluted environments, even as homes, agricultural lands, and public spaces are turned into great nuisance because of the volume of dangerous chemicals that have been dumped around or released into the air.

Politicians involved in these criminal activities, which could be tagged as 'corruption-inspired pollution' rather choose to collect monetary gratifications, job allocations, and construction job contracts from oil mining companies, at the detriment of fighting against the unprofessional management of waste chemical products by oil companies in the Niger Delta. By that, companies become shamefully licensed to dump dangerous chemicals carelessly on any sites of their choice, and anywhere within the area. Some of such politicians and community leaders even go as far as collecting cash payments from those conglomerates in place of various social amenities programmed for execution in their various communities.

For instance, an investigation into the accounts books and financial activities of the NDDC (Niger Delta Development Commission) between January, 2013 and 30th June, 2018, by the office of the Accountant General of the Federal confirms in clear terms that within the period under review, the commission paid out a colossal sum of N61.468b for contract jobs that were never executed. The report adds that the laughable payments were doled out to contractors as mobilization for various jobs which were never executed, neither did the contracted involved ever visit the various sites for which this huge sum of cash was pushed out.

The report adds that within the same time too, the same commission doled out the sum of N2.53 billion for the supply of 3,853 doses of Hepatitis B vaccines, 1570 doses of Typhoid fever vaccines and Lassa fever kits to its warehouse located in Port

Harcourt, Rivers State. It also adds that the NDDC also spent the sum of N1.7 billion on a partnership on Entrepreneurship Development Scheme (EDS) without any specific benefits or particular procedure for the recovery of its investment. Meanwhile, another huge sum of N190.956 million was also paid by the commission as compensation without evidence of job execution. The list of corrupt practices and financial misappropriations perpetrated by politicians and persons in the corridors of power against the development of the Niger Delta region is just endless. In view of the limited scope of this paper, only few can be cited. Even at that, the official release of the higher powered forensic investigators established by the Federal Government of Nigeria on the contract jobs done in the region within the past few years are still being awaited, even as there are emerging indications that some of Nigeria's politicians and political office holders could be indicted (Akowe&Oluwasegun, 2020).

At that, oil conglomerates operate in oil-rich communities, tap the oil, bag them in their containers, and cart away the cash, without fulfilling their corporate social responsibilities to their host communities. It is not surprising then that such communities still lack good roads, hospital facilities, electricity supplies, and pipe borne water networks. These unholy developments rather increase poverty, exacerbate joblessness among the youth, and fast-track the spread of criminality and insurgency among the populations of the area. Instead of investing the wealth accrued from the nation's mineral oil in the development of the Niger Delta which houses the nation's huge oil wells, poverty, joblessness, and forms of economic hallucinations are unleashed on the people with impunity. Thus, the goose that lays the golden egg is forced to die of a planned act of starvation (Calvocoressi, 1987; Ezirim, 2010).

As well, the presence of oil wealth in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been responsible for the increased numbers of illegal oil wells operated by the indigenes of the oil-rich areas of the region. These illegal and nocturnal oil wells are operated by jobless youth and other hoodlums who feel abandoned and neglected in the sharing of the natural wealth nature has stored up in their lands. Unfortunately, the operators of those illegal and dangerous facilities

have no prior technical experiences of oil mining. They use improvised facilities, and even adopt dangerous and highly unscientific distilling techniques in the process of producing their brands of petroleum products.

The consequences of these illegal and poor mining activities are quite enormous. Often, bushes and agricultural lands are set on fire. Motor vehicles and other property are lost to fire accidents. Farmlands and precious food crops are destroyed with impunity. Dangerous chemical products are deliberately pumped into rivers and surrounding natural human environments. Obviously, these increase the volume of air pollutions in communities, introduce the supply of adulterated petroleum products into the Nigerian market, endanger aquatic life, exacerbate desertification, pose security threats to communities, fuel youth militancy within the region, increase erosion activities, and impact the creation of food shortages in local communities (Ibaba, 2001; Ezeibe, 2011).

The sad incidents of oil pipeline vandalizations in the Niger Delta region and other parts of Nigeria have also been held accountable for the increased levels of pollution activities experienced in the area. It is however sad to mention that the Niger Delta areas endure a larger share of the cases of vandalization counted in Nigeria. Essentially, these criminal activities are perpetrated by militant youth of the region, oil bunkering networks, and black market oil dealers, who market petroleum products in unauthorized tanks, plastic containers, and unapproved drums. Eze (2004), in Ezeibe (2011) strongly maintains that oil pipeline vandalization constitutes a high level crime, and an economic sabotage against the Nigerian nation, and attracts a capital punishment, according to the Criminal Justice Decree of 1975. The source regrettably adds that in the year 2000 alone, more than 400 cases of oil pipeline vandalization were recorded in the Niger Delta areas alone. This was in great contrast with the 50 sad incidents which were recorded in 1999. In each of these incidents, precious lives and property were incinerated, while dangerous levels of air and environmental pollutions were unleashed into the immediate and surrounding environments.

These tales of woes consolidate support in favour of Aniche (2016) who reluctantly counted Nigeria's oil wealth in the Niger Delta as the 'devil's excreta.' Obviously, this source bases his theory on the fact that the mining of crude oil within the Niger Delta region has rather destroyed the area, rendered its environments uninhabitable, created dangerous health hazards among the populations, and even led to the premature deaths of innocent inhabitants of the region. While making a case with the dangerous environmental disasters created as a consequence of the uncontrolled gas flaring activities conducted by the oil conglomerates, the author strongly contends that the unprofessional unsystematic handling of this dangerous exercise has virtually snuffed normal healthy life away from the region. It argues further that as a consequence, the natural environments of the Niger Delta have been turned into some daylight death traps, while her streams and aquatic life remain terribly acidified.

In addition, the indiscriminate dumping of refuse and other solid wastes by oil mining companies, individual persons, markets, and industries constitutes another source of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta areas. For the careless disposal of industrial chemical wastes, oil companies in the Niger Delta are held solely accountable. The area is also littered with plastic bottles generated by employees and residents of the host communities of the area. It is not an exaggeration therefore that countless numbers of public places, motor parks, market places, playgrounds, schools, and church facilities have been turned into terrible eyesores and forms of nuisance as a result of these uncontrolled human activities. Consequently, the affected environments are defaced, domestic and industrial wastes are dumped indiscriminately, while gutters and water channels become blocked, with the effect that life threatening incidents of erosion and excessive flooding are created (Ezeibe, 2011; Igwe, 2012; Aniche, 2016; Akowe, 2020).

These claims are strongly supported by Nzeadibe (2015) who vehemently insists that 'climate change is a major challenge confronting communities in the Niger Delta. The region is especially vulnerable to climate change because of its fragile ecosystem and human activities such as gas flaring that have heightened the

propensity of climate change and its impacts.' This source maintains the position that the communities caught up in this ecological quagmire were able to evolve some adaptation measures which farmers in the region adopted in an effort to make their environments favourable to agriculture. It is the position of this source however that greater awareness still needs to be created among the populations of affected communities in order to make this initiative workable. To that end, the source concludes by challenging the various Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) operating within the Niger Delta region to rise to the occasion by embarking on some aggressive awareness exercises in the rural communities. By that, no one would be left in the dark about the ecological disasters associated with the environmental pollutions and climate change exacerbated by oil mining activities conducted within their region.

In the face of these extremely challenging situations, residents of the Niger Delta have become so dangerously exposed to countless life threatening conditions emanating from the numerous environmental pollution hazards they encounter daily. The natural beauty of the area is almost totally destroyed. Their farmlands and agricultural areas have been polluted with dangerous chemicals, with the effect that they have become very unproductive and unhealthy to depend on. Road networks have been dangerously affected. Flora and fauna in the oceans have been virtually exterminated, while fishes have almost disappeared, thereby rendering fishermen jobless. Faced by these challenging situations, food prices continue to skyrocket tremendously within the area, while the metal roofs of residential buildings continue to face excessive and premature corrosions. Thus, the increasing incidents of environmental pollutions in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have virtually turned the various communities into death traps, frosted with numerous infrastructural and health-related complications.

Conclusion

We like to conclude this paper on the note that the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria have been so adversely affected by high levels of

environmental pollution. The poor states of the human and natural environments in the oil-rich areas of Nigeria raise a number of issues of great concern. The terrible environmental situations, as well as the epileptic pace of infrastructural developments experienced by the host communities of Nigeria's oil wealth communities in the Niger Delta call for a serious re-think. It begins to raise a number of keys questions which demand urgent answers, which include the following: Why have the oil-rich Niger Delta areas of Nigeria remained largely underdeveloped, dangerously polluted, and highly impoverished several years after commercial oil exploration started in the areas in the areas? This fundamental definitely demands a positive answer and an action-based commitment to the infrastructural development of the region. The era of politicking and deceit of the peoples of the oil-rich host communities should be ended. Concerted efforts which aim at ending the colossal and reckless pollutions going on in those areas must be followed. At that, politicians and government agencies responsible for executing development projects within the areas must be called to order, and made to appreciate the great need to feed the patriotic goose that lays the golden eggs.

The way forward

At this stage, it is candidly felt that the Nigerian government should create relevant environmental laws and regulations which guide the activities and professional conducts of mining companies operating in the Niger Delta areas of the country. Considering the fact that the affected areas currently experience enormous environmental pollution challenges, it has become incumbent that the various mining companies need to be held accountable for the various environmental hazards they create. At that, affected host communities deserve to be adequately compensated for all their losses which are traceable to environmental pollutions created in the course of oil and gas explorations within the region. Towards achieving these objectives, the Federal Government of Nigeria needs to establish a number of task forces who should be mandated to verify all cases of environmental pollutions in the Niger Delta, identify the perpetrators, and prosecute them in the law courts of

the land. On the part of the affected communities within the oil-rich areas, there is need to sensitize and support them to embark on aggressive tree planting exercises, engage in thorough cleanup of their surroundings, open spaces, public spaces, and home environments. To a large extent, these could assist the affected pollution-ridden Niger Delta areas to begin to experience some level of improvements in their immediate and surrounding environments.

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