

CURSES IN BLESSED LAND: VOILENCE IN NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Environment, peace and conflict are inseparable phenomena in Nigeria's historical development. Over the years and now environmental problems have taken centre stage of Nigeria political and economic discuss. Sometimes, environmental based issues leads to peace while at other times it contributes to conflict outbreak in Nigeria. Environmental conflict has produced group of scholars known as political ecologists whose aim is to unveil why rich natural resource areas are infested with prolonged conflict or crisis. However, scholars and practitioners of environmental are interested in environment and conflict in isolation of peace thereby neglecting how environmental factors contribute to peace building. To this extent, the study interrogates the nexus between the natural resources embedded in the environment (crude oil production specifically) and violent conflict that emanates thereof in Nigeria. The scope of the study is Niger Delta region of Nigeria and its environment. The study employs mixed method of data collection and analysis. The study concludes that environmental negligence by oil firms and the government on the other hand has contributed to conflict outbreak and retards peaceful coexistence among the people of Niger Delta. The study recommends that the government (whether at the Federal or State or Local Government level) must regulate and monitor the activities of the multinational oil companies and that of the host communities in the Niger Delta region.

Keyword: Environment, Peace, Conflict, Violence, Nigeria, Niger Delta

Introduction

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria is situated in the Gulf of Guinea between longitude 500E to 800E and latitudes 400N to 600N and it is the largest mangrove forests in Africa region and the third biggest in the world (Azaiki, 2003; Ana, 2011; Aniefiok, et al., 2013; Asanebi, 2016). The Niger Delta region is grouped under the tropical rain forest that is located in the north of the Delta (Aniefiok et al., 2013; Asanebi, 2016) which is located between 40N – 100 N of the equator, with an altitude that is less than 1000 meters and annual rainfall that is always high, and it is not the same within the region (Azaiki, 2003; Asanebi, 2016).

The establishment of the Niger Delta is as a result of the breaking away of the 4,100km-long Niger River joining estuaries from where it flows into the Atlantic Ocean at the Gulf of Guinea (Fagbeja et al. 2008). The Niger Delta region is located at the zenith of the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of Africa (Doust, 1999; Haach et al., 2000; Aniefiok, et al., 2013) within the Nigeria's South–South geopolitical zone. The Niger Delta is a home to about 31 million people (Young, 2012; Aniefiok, et al., 2013), occupies a total area of about 75,000 km² and which makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass (Aniefiok, et al. 2013).

Specifically, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as named after Sir Henry Willink's Commission was created by the British Government, which saw the creation of Niger Delta region in 1958 to be represented by three major groups, which were –“Ogonis, Degema and Brass, including the western Ijaws” and this falls into Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states (Asanebi 2016). The result of Sir Henry Willink's Commission was a hallmark in the establishment of the Niger Delta Basin Development Board (NDBDB) in 1961 by the first Republic Government of Nigeria (Asanebi 2016). However, the geographical and political location of Niger Delta region has been redefined due to the ethnic politics involved in revenue distribution from the oil profits circulation and with the objective of accessing bigger shares of the oil revenue (Asanebi 2016).

Seemingly, formal President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration added Akwa Ibom, Abia, Cross River, Imo, Ondo and Edo States to the core Niger Delta making it a total number of nine states in 2000 (Asanebi 2016). To this extent, the study interrogates the nexus between in the environmental degradation (oil pollution) in Niger Delta Region and violent conflict that emanates thereof in Nigeria. There are various theoretical analysis developed by scholars on which we can understand the impact of pollution on Niger Delta region.

Theoretical Bases for Analysis

Many scholars and theorists that have written widely on the nature of oil as a natural resources and harbinger of conflict and social crisis are of the opinion that various perspectives have been linked to this quagmire. The following perspectives and theorists are of our concern to this study; Marxian theory, and the recourse Course theory. Here we will discuss these theories hitherto.

1. Marxian Social Conflict Theory

The social conflict theory is a sociological theory associated with Karl Marx. It seeks to explain political and economic events in terms of an ongoing struggle over finite resources. This type of struggle, Karl Marx emphasizes the unequal relationship between social classes that emanates from the relationship between the managers of capital—which Marx described as the “bourgeoisie”—and the working class, which he call the “proletariat”. The social conflict of Karl Marx is also known as conflict theory. Conflict theory had a notable influence on 19th and 20th-century thought which grows to influence political discuss to this day. Conflict theory, first purported by Karl Marx, is a theory that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. Conflict theory stated that social order is maintained by domination and power,

rather than by authority and conformity. According to conflict theory analysis, which stated that those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, mainly by suppressing the poor and powerless? A core premise of conflict theory is that people and groups within society will work to actualize their own wealth and power.

2. Resource Curse theory

The resource curse theory has its emergence at the beginning of the 1990s. It was an economic and geographer, Richard Auty in 1993 was the first to introduce the term. It refers to the possible negative impacts of resource wealth on a country's socio-economic development, its institutions and social stability. However, studies on the resource curse had a strong focus on the macro level. Scholars have paid particular attention to how oil, alluvial gemstones, other mineral resources, timber and contraband goods affect the onset and duration of violent conflicts. Empirical research does not support a deterministic cause-and-effect relationship between resources and conflict. Scholars have therefore moved on to exploring the effect of intervening variables, such as the level of resource dependency, the geographical location, the characteristics of resources, state capacity and the governance of conflict-prone natural resources. Environmental studies, concentrates on the influential works of Thomas Homer-Dixon whose focus is on the link between environmental scarcity or damage and violent conflict. There are various causes of unresolved ecological conflicts in Niger Delta. They include,

The Role of oil Resources in Conflict Escalation

Natural resource conflicts arise when parties disagree about the management, distribution and protection of natural resources and related ecosystems. These conflicts can escalate into destructive relations and violence when the parties are unable or unwilling to engage in a constructive process of dialogue and conflict resolution. Societies lacking the institutional arrangements that facilitate constructive conflict resolution can be drawn into intractable cycles of conflict and violence, particularly where political systems are fragile, and in situations where divisions between opposing parties are extreme. While there are many issues that can cause conflict between groups, the role of natural resources in triggering, escalating or sustaining violent conflict is the focus of this series of Guidance Notes. They provide practical guidance on the role that the UN, AU and EU can play in terms of early warning and assessment, structural conflict prevention (long-term measures) and direct conflict prevention (short-term measures).

They are meant to provide a combination of strategic advice and operational guidance. The urgency of developing practical guidance on preventing conflicts over natural resources was highlighted by a 2009 UNEP entitled, *From Conflict to Peace building: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment*. This report synthesizes a decade of academic research, and draws upon the United Nation's own experiences on the linkages between natural resources, violent conflict and peace building. The main findings from the report include:

- Over the past 60 years, 40% of civil wars can be associated with natural resources associated with oil; since 1990 there have been at least 18 violent conflicts fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources.
- Natural resources and other environmental factors are linked to violent conflict in a variety of ways that are often obscured by more visible drivers such as ethnic tensions. Specifically, competition to control or gain access to natural resources can contribute to the outbreak of violent conflict. Natural resources can be

exploited by rebel groups to fund war. During conflict, individuals and groups may be able to exploit natural resources in ways that create an incentive for them to obstruct or undermine efforts to build peace.

- The environment suffers tremendous harm during violent conflict: resources may be targeted for destruction or damaged by bombs and other ordinance; war may displace populations into fragile environments where the struggle to survive degrades the resource base; and, the institutions designed to manage the environment may be disrupted or shut down during a war.
- In rebuilding war-torn societies, the environment and natural resources play a wide range of crucial roles—from supporting economic recovery, to the creation of livelihoods and the resettlement of displaced populations, to providing opportunities for dialogue, cooperation, confidence-building, and government reform.

The unresolved Conflict in Niger Delta

The following are the causes of oil related conflicts global terms:

Poor engagement of communities and stakeholders: Where communities and stakeholders are poorly engaged, marginalized or excluded from the dialogue in the EI development process, they are almost certain to begin to oppose the development. As the conflict escalates, the use of strategies of violence as a coercive measure against the company, and as a means for addressing old grievances and mounting opposition against the government, are likely.

Inadequate benefit-sharing and Excessive impact on the community economy: The benefits of oil proceed are distributed in a manner that appears unfair as compared to the distribution of the costs, risks and responsibilities, hazards than those who are disenfranchised or bearing risks and responsibilities without fair compensation of the locales which are likely to oppose the development, and possibly rebellion.

Notwithstanding the promise of prosperity often associated with the EIs, the impacts on the local economy and the macroeconomic conditions of the state as a whole can be quite negative; in this view where the governing institutions are weak or underdeveloped, the implications of the “resource curse” are often magnified. Nevertheless, while social and environmental assessments and management procedures in the EI sector are well developed, mitigations on communities and the environment continue to be a powerful conflict driver.

Mismanagement of funds and Weak legal framework: The basis of our argument here is that corruption and misuse of funds to satisfy individual or institutional gains is at the expense of national and community interests which can easily lead to conflict. There is vast revenues which have been diverted away from the public interest to satisfy personal gains and, in some cases, to finance militants or armies for violent purposes. The Nigerian polity is fundamentally weak with her institution. The constitution of Nigeria has been described as the fundamental basis of this weakness. The constitution establishes federal might in allocation of oil revenue including a low percentage in the place of derivation.

Federal Government Unwillingness to address the natural resources question:

Where natural resources have been an underlying cause for war they can reignite conflict if the relevant issues are not addressed in the Peace process. Issues of ownership, wealth-sharing and distribution are often important and will have significant effects on the capacity to achieve post-conflict stability.

Ecological Pollution in Niger Delta

Ecosystem is a community of living organisms that exist with then on living components of their environment that share the benefits in the environment such as air, food, water and soil (Hatcher, 1990). These biotic and abiotic components are connected together through nutrient cycles and energy flows (Odum 1971). Humans operate within ecosystems and their cumulative effects are large enough to influence external factors like climate, as the ecosystems provide a variety of goods and services upon which people depend (Schoener 2009). Human can pollute and destroy the ecosystem through the overuse of the available natural resources (Jones, Lawton & Shachak, 1994). This ecological degradation in Niger Delta region has polluted the environmental bodies. Thus, environmental pollution has made people to opt for arms conflict to drive their goal to the federal government.

Pollution is simply the introduction of contaminants into the natural environment that could alter the normal occurrences or distort the orderliness in the system. Pollution was also defined by the European Union 1996 Councilor indirect introduction as a result of human activity, of substances, vibrations, heat or noise into the air, water or land which may be harmful to human health or the quality of the environment, result in damage to material property, or impair or interfere with amenities and other legitimate uses of the environment” (Fagbeja et al. 2008). There are different types of pollutions in the rich oil Niger Delta Region.

The pollution of the environment overtime usually leads to the total destruction of the entire ecosystem (Bodo, 2019). Ecological destruction is happening everyday as it is reported that 25%of our coral reefs have disappeared and it is expected that 60% more will be gone in 30 years (Gimah and Bodo, 2019a; Gimah and Bodo, 2019b) . This is as a result of acidification of the oceans through water pollution and illegal fishing. Quest for development has necessitated to intense deforestation leading to the burning and cutting down of more than 4.6 million hectares of forest (Bodo and Gimah, 2018; Gimah and Bodo, 2019a; Gimah and Bodo,2019b). The case of Niger Delta ecosystem is even more pathetic as the people are not knowledgeable on the consequences and implications of destroying their environment (Bodo, 2018; Gimah and Bodo, 2019a) as oil exploitation has lead to massive habitat loss (Gimah and Bodo, 2019b). The study identifies various ecological and pollution associated and identified in Nigeria Delta region, which includes.

Air Pollution

Air Pollution results from the presence of one or more contaminants or pollutants in the atmosphere in a quantity above the bearable limits over a long period of time causing harm to man, animals, plants and other materials exposed in the environment (Ukpere et al. 2018). Air pollution could come into a system through natural (earthquakes, volcanic eruption, etc) or anthropogenic or manmade sources (gas flaring, bush burning, etc). In the Niger Delta region, virtually all forms of pollution and the ecological destruction of the region are through manmade sources (Bodo 2019).

Air pollution as a normal occurrence is a serious environmental problem confronting the Niger Delta people. The air pollution of the region results from operations of oil industries that usually releases a barrage of substances like volatile organics, oxides of carbon, nitrogen, sulphur, particulate matter, heavy metals and other toxics at levels that exceed both the national and international standards (Ana 2011). In the Niger Delta, the major source of the air pollution is gas flaring by the operating oil companies (Bodo 2018). Gas flaring contributed an estimated 12.7 million metric tonnes of carbon in 2004 through CO₂ emissions by the oil industries in the Niger Delta alone (Marland et al., 2007; Fagbeja et al., 2008).

There is a daily flaring of gas in the region has lead to the discharge of about 45.8 billion kilowatts of heat are into the atmosphere of the Niger-Delta from 1.8 billion cubic feet of gas everyday (Aaron, 2006). At this flared sites, temperatures are reported to be as high as 1,600°C (Ogbuigwe 1998). It is reported that even at an average distance of 48.8 meters from the flared sites in Isoko in Delta State, the temperature was still as high as 400°C was recorded (Ogbuigwe, 1998; Ana 2011). In all issues of air pollution, it has been found out that the statutory standards and regulations guiding air pollution in Nigeria were not followed (Oluwole et al., 1996; Olobaniyi and Efe, 2007).

Pollution in the Water Bodies

Water is very essential for human survival. The challenges associated with the available water could either of the following cases: *'too little water, too much water, and polluted water'* (Adebola 2001; Nduka and Orisakwe, 2011). Niger Delta region of Nigeria is faced several environmental issues among which water contamination is predominant (Akpan and Ajayi, 2006; Raji & Abejide, 2013) and even the available water is usually polluted because of environmental pollution and degradation of the area (Efe 2001). The access to safe drinking water is gradually reduced based on the activities from oil exploration and spills (Akpan and Ajayi, 2006; World Bank, 2008). Studies have revealed that there is a strong relationship between human activities and pollution of the environment (Jenkins et al. 1996).

In the case of the Niger Delta region, the oil exploitation in the region by multinational oil companies has lead to the water contamination of the entire region and has had its toll on the environment (Nduka et al. 2008). Oil extraction and spill as major contributors to extensive pollution of watercourses in the Niger Delta (Akpan and Ajayi, 2006; UNEP, 2011; Bodo, 2019). In the Niger Delta alone, there have been more than 4,000 oil spills, discharging several million barrels of crude oil into the ponds, ditches, creeks, beaches, streams, and rivers (Amaize, 2007; Nduka and Orisakwe, 2011).

Land Pollution

The refineries that carry oil from pipelines that sometimes are already corroded or rusted in a bad manner (Ugboma 2015). The leakages from the corroded pipes usually spurt over a wide area destroying crops, fish ponds, economic trees, farmlands, and biodiversity (Ugboma, 2015). It has been reported that an average of one oil spill occurs every week causing grave damages in the environment in the Niger Delta (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2006; Ugboma, 2015). According to (Ugboma 2015), fires occasioned by

explosion of oil tankers, oil installations, and leakages from oil pipes and pipelines explosion during oil bunkering or pipeline vandalism destroys the plants, insects, birds and also burn the organic matter content of the soil. The impact of land pollution has lead to the reduction of agricultural activities, water supply settlement and the ecosystem or biodiversity within the region (Oronto 1998).

The Oil spillage causes damages to the environment and suffering to the people as in many instances, lives have been lost (Ugboma 2015). Atypical example is in 1998 where more than 100 youths, women and children perished in the Jesse inferno leaving the community highly devastated and improvised; and the Idobo platform spillage that affected five communities leading to ecological damages of flora and fauna (Ugboma 2015). The heating up of the environment from pollution sites kills vegetation around the heat area. It suppresses the growth of flowering plants and reduces agricultural productivity and wild life biodiversity (Ana 2011). However, the use of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta has lead to huge land degradation (Saro-Wiwa 1992).

Strategies of Resolving Global Oil Conflicts

Uzodigwe et.al (2023) stated that every conflict that emanates from the locale has a global world view. Thus, they argued that indigenous African globalization is a pathway to African development. There are various global strategies stipulated here in other to manage oil associated conflicts. They include;

Encouraging of Transparent and Effective Management of Revenues

Oil production and development may result in massive increases to government revenues. If improperly managed these increases can stimulate corruption and undermine the stability of the government. The severity of these problems in the recent past inspired national governments from around the world, multi-national corporations and international agencies like the World Bank to establish the process and procedures which is dedicated to supporting transparency in the payment of fees from state oil extraction to governments. Oil companies publish what they pay to governments and governments publish what they receive and additionally independent audit is undertaken to assess any discrepancies between these accounts. These processes should be implemented in many African countries and several other parts of the world. In addition to promoting the AU, UN, EU and other agencies can provide technical assistance to help governments increase their capacity to manage revenues from oil generated revenue in a manner that prevents an escalation in corruption and delivers more social benefits to the population.

Strengthening the Institutional and Legal Framework

All of the strategies outlined above are directly or indirectly dependent upon the institutional and legal framework that governs EI development and management. UN, AU and EU other agencies can play an important role in supporting the development of this framework as part of assistance strategies. Each of the conflict dimensions addressed in sections two and four have a country specific legal and institutional context. These assistance strategies need to focus on areas where this context is not conducive to conflict management and prevention, or where implementation is lacking. At the most fundamental level a new national compact related to extractive resources may need to be negotiated as part of a constitutional accord in order to maintain peace and stability. This is particularly the case in divided societies, where ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious

differences align with real or perceived inequities in the distribution of the resources and the impact associated with their development. An important first step in addressing EI issues in this context is separating notions of ownership from responsibilities for management and distribution of benefits. This expands the potential for solutions whether the goal is a comprehensive peace agreement (as outlined above), a new constitution or the prevention of a conflict that may undermine state stability and break out into war.

Addressing Environmental Impacts and Security Forces

Application of projects that create serious and irreversible environmental impacts are very likely to generate conflict; the potential for conflict is heightened in situations where the natural resources in question are highly valued by local communities and stakeholders. While the trade-offs may appear worthwhile from an external perspective the capacity of these impacts to fuel escalating conflict is very real. Water resources are often at the nexus between environmental impact and conflict as community interests in water are so varied and so often absolute. A participatory assessment process is a key starting point for managing environmental impacts. Furthermore, strategies for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict as outlined above, will lead to assessment needs to integrate analysis of social and economic linkages and dovetail with the development and negotiation of management, mitigation and compensation strategies. These are the ways by which environmental issues can be handled;

- Avoidance of certain impacts where the values at stake are too high and likely to take on iconic significance in terms of the legacy of the development.
- Ensuring that the priorities given to protecting key environments, mitigating specific impacts and providing compensation reflect the interests of those that are most affected and concerned.
- Engaging of stakeholders in the monitoring and management process;
- Restoring ecosystems that may have been previously degraded as a form of compensation.

In response to the human rights abuses and risks associated with the use of private security firms in the oil producing area; companies, governments and NGOs collaborated to develop the Voluntary Principles (VPs). This was established in 2000, the VPs on Security and Human Rights provides guidance on oil producing companies on maintaining the safety and security of their operations within an operating framework that ensures respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Transparent and Effective Management of oil Revenues

Oil production and development may result in massive increases to government revenues. If improperly managed these increases can stimulate corruption and undermine the stability of the government. The severity of these problems in the recent past inspired national governments from around the world, multi-national corporations and international agencies like the World Bank to establish the EITI which is dedicated to supporting transparency in the payment of fees from EI to governments. A comprehensive program of legal and institutional development was implemented in São Tomé and Príncipe in anticipation of significant revenues from recently discovered oil. Beyond assisting governments with improving transparency and management of revenues, UN, AU and EU agencies are also well positioned to assist in planning investments that will yield sustainable social benefits and improved socioeconomic conditions through

country assistance development programs

Supporting the Indigenous Communities and Private Sector Employment

Oil production and development of projects often have significant impacts on indigenous populations whose culture and traditions are quite different from those of the national culture. Both national governments and other stakeholders are now challenged to engage with indigenous cultures in a manner that is consistent with the recently adopted Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The implications of these international legal norms create significant additional obligations, especially if oil production and development is going to occur within the extractive industries and conflict traditional territory of the indigenous people. For example, conflicts between the statutory tenures and concessions of states, and the customary rights and ownership of indigenous people living in the state are common. Extraction of oil and oil production are often positioned between the two; when their statutory rights are in conflict with the customary rights of indigenous communities they need to develop good relations in order to successfully develop their project. International norms and best practice guidance for engaging with indigenous cultures are well developed and continue to evolve.

Politics of Blame Game in Oil Niger Delta Region

The Stakeholders and oil businesses in the Niger Delta region is very profitable to everyone involved (Bodo 2019). The identified groups (or Stakeholders) that benefits from the oil exploitation business in Nigeria are the Government (comprising the Federal, State and Local Government); the operating oil companies (whether local or foreign); and finally the host community representatives, which are usually a political or local leader, paramount or village chiefs, or a militant leader or groups (Bodo and David 2018). The government of Nigeria as we already know owns all the resources and the management of the oil business in Nigeria; and has been carrying out profitably for many years, as over 90 percent of its expenditures depend on the success of this business (Alley et al, 2014). The licensed operating companies are taxed with the responsibility of increasing production and sales of oil at all cost possible, and give expected returns to the government (Bodo 2019).

Unfortunately, for the government, these oil companies have expanded their operations and have been making profits even beyond the margin of bargain with the government, as it has been reported that the government oil owned company (NNPC) and some multinational oil companies do not give accurate reports on the number of barrels of crude oil produced per day or the amount sold in the international market (Bodo 2019). Some of the oil bearing community representatives seize the opportunity on being the spoke person to enrich themselves at the expense of developing the region. Monies meant for the development of the region are usually shared among themselves while the problem of the region persists (Bodo 2019). In most cases these representatives return home to deceive or mislead the villagers and talk them into staying patiently with their suffering for a longer period.

The Ogoni people were quick to identify some of their leaders that were collecting monies on their behalf, without using it for the development of the community, as they were called cultures. The militant youths on their own part terrorized the multinational companies through the kidnapping of their staffs, blowing up of their vessels and

vandalism of oil pipelines; to draw the attention to their plight (Bodo and David 2018). The government and the multinational have paid billions of naira to different militant leaders and groups as ransom for kidnap victims and also for them to surrender their arms and embrace peace. Currently, illegal oil bunkering or refining by the different militant groups in the region has lead to the enrichment of the operators with benefits shared with the security operatives on a daily basis. For the stakeholders, oil exploitation has been very beneficial and should continue as long as they continue to be part of the booming business.

The victims in Niger Delta oil degradation are common people of the region. The Niger Delta has been described as a region that is so rich in petroleum resources and yet it is the home to one of the poorest groups in the country. In most of the communities that are host to the operating oil companies, there are no basic amenities like safe drinking water or electricity. The natural systems of air, water and land have been massively destroyed. The victims in the Niger Delta region are the ordinary community dwellers or villagers (constituting men, women and children) with no traditional or political title, and with little or no money to relocate from the polluted areas and with no alternative means of livelihood (aside from farming and fishing);but rather stay-put in their communities and survive with the consequences of the polluted environment. These victims have become helpless, homeless and hopeless in their situation.

However, the Culprits in oil theft and damage and every stakeholder in the oil business in the Niger Delta has overtime declares their innocence in the destruction of the region. The denial by every stakeholders in the oil business has always come as surprising since the destruction of the region were not through natural processes (like volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc); but through human activities. Unfortunately, despite denying responsibility for the destruction of the ecosystem in the region; there had been counter accusations between the stakeholders on who should be blamed in the crisis and devastation of the region (Bodo 2019).

Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) in their 2006Annual report stated that the oil industry submitted a proposal to the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) for the air quality assessment in the Niger Delta, but the approval from the government agency came after five decades of oil exploration, and gas flaring, in the region (Fagbeja et al. 2008).

According to (Bodo 2019) Chevron in 1980 preferred to pay \$1 million per year as fine for gas flaring than incurring a cost of \$ 56 million in compliance with the Gas Re-injection Decree. Clearly, the operations of this multinational oil companies occasioned by several oil spills (see Table 1) in the environment has contributed to the destruction of the environment; so should be blamed for the part they have played.

Table 1: Quantity of Oil Produced and Spilled from (2010-2015)

S/No	Year	No. of Spill	Quantity spilled/barrel	Quantity recovered (barrels)	Net loss to environment (barrels)	% loss to environment
1	2010	258	108,367.01	2785.96	105,561.05	97.43
2	2011	378	1,476.70	1,476.70	49711.20	97.12
3	2012	453	2937.08	2937.08	5,168.24	63.76
4	2013	495	2,3335.93	2,3335.93	32,796.78	93.38
5	2014	417	3110.02	3110.02	60567.15	95.12
6	2015	156	1,183.80	1,183.80	38,719.86	97.03
Total		2159	13,829.49	13,829.49	292,544.28	95.49

Source: Oronto, 1998; Ugboma, 2015

Like the other oil companies operating in Nigeria, the UNEP in their report revealed that SPDC did not follow Nigeria environmental standard or even the SPDC industry standards (Amnesty International, 2021; Agbonifo, 2016). SPDC acknowledged the negligence of their operations in Ogoniland, when UNEP reported their discoveries on the Ogoni environment and promised to take immediate action, working with communities, government and other stakeholders to bring about the prosperity of the Ogonis (Agbonifo, 2016).

Table 2: Oil spill, volume and cause (2014-2019)

Year	No. Spills	Volume Spills/Barrel	Major causes
2014	180	10,000	95% sabotage
2015	170	20,000	Sabotage and operational (50% each)
2016	250	30,000	Operational 70% sabotage 30%
2017	170	100,000	Operational and sabotage 50% each
2018	150	110,000	Sabotage 90% and operational 10%
2019	190	28,000	Sabotage 80% and operational 20%

Sources: Amnesty International 2019

The government also shares in the blame, because of the lack of appropriate regulation and the political will to enforce environmental regulations. Scholars have argued that government negligence of the challenges facing the Niger Delta people is the major cause of oil spills in the Niger Delta (Agbonifo 2016). The government environmental agencies like, the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) and the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) lack the authority to respond to oil spills caused by the operating oil companies (Agbonifo 2016). It has been discovered that in some quarters that these government agencies do not only receive information on numbers of oil spills from the multinational oil companies, but also depends on them for the financing of its operations as in many cases, governmental agencies have neither an helicopter nor any other transportation means onshore and offshore oil and gas operations and spills in the region (Odoemene 2011). This situation has lead to the conclusion that the regulatory agencies are almost at the mercy of the operating oil companies and are fully dependant on them for logistical support (UNDP 2006; Muller 2010; Agbonifo 2016).

Conclusion And Recommendations

It is no longer debate that oil exploration has cause huge environmental devastation of the Niger Delta region. The pollution of the region has resulted into the lost of livelihood of the people as their farmlands and rivers for other agricultural purposes like fishing activities have been destroyed. However, other stakeholders in the oil business cannot abstain from their involvement or their part that lead to the destruction of the Niger Delta ecosystem. Generally, the blame directly goes to the government, multinational oil companies, militant groups, political leaders and the community chiefs for the destruction and degradation of the Niger Delta ecosystem.

The multinational oil companies has to put in place their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) effectively by ensuring that the needed basic amenities in the host communities and accepting responsibility for every oil spills in the region by ensuring that the oil pipelines are adequately monitored or policed to protect the lives and properties in their line of operation. The members (the youths, political or local leaders, traditional leaders, chiefs, youths, women, etc) of the host communities where these oil explorations occurs should guard their environment against all forms of pollution by working in harmony with the operating oil companies, to create a peaceful environment that is free from violence and any form of civil disturbance or civil unrest. The community members must desist from acts (like illegal oil refining, oil pipe vandalism, bombing of flow stations, kidnapping, etc) that further destroys their environment and put the integrity of members of the host community in a bad light.

However, the government (whether at the Federal or State or Local Government level) has to regulate and put a stop to the activities of the multinational oil companies in the host communities in the Niger Delta region that pollutes the environment. The government must make sure that the Niger Delta is developed at all cost. The government has to put in a place all vital environmental laws and regulations which will be followed in the exploration of petroleum in the region. In the same vain the government and multinational oil companies has to be fair and sincere to the challenges of the Niger Delta people of Nigeria.

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