

ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY IN THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA: EVIDENCE FROM CASES BETWEEN 1990 - 2005

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Abstract

Oil has been an important part of the Nigerian economy since vast reserves of petroleum were discovered in the Niger Delta in the 1950s. In recent years the Niger Delta area has been engulfed in a crisis of instability caused by protesting oil producing communities agitating for environmental protection and a fair share of the oil wealth generated from their area.

Adopting the U. S. National Security Strategy for classifying environmental security threats, the paper catalogued 31 cases of environmentally induced conflict within the past fifteen years (1990 - 2005). These crises threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian state and had calculable effects on the global economy. To stem the trend of oil induced crisis the paper opined that environmental regulatory agencies should be strengthened to effectively

» monitor and enforce all law and regulating relating to oil and gas exploration and production activities.

Keywords: Environmental security, Niger Delta, Oil pollution, Community, Oil producing companies.

Introduction

Environmental security is emerging rapidly as a field of interest at the global level, because of its vital relevance to the livelihoods of billions of people. It is a vital component of sustainable development (Switzer, 2002). In the past, environment has been primarily looked upon as a victim of conflict rather than a cause of conflict. Today, the disturbing rate of global environmental change on the one hand and the signs of exceeding the earth's system limits by humankind on the other are now increasingly considered in terms of human security and viewed much more urgent and important a future challenge than the issue of war and peace. This view has been widely shared (Waddell, 1992; Soroos, 1989; and Bjorkbon and Sevedin, 1992).

Definitions of the term environmental security are many and varied probably because the term is a mixture of language used by the military and traditional groups and social thinkers. Brown (1997), defines environmental security as the protectedness of natural environmental and vital interests of citizens, society, the state from the internal and external impacts, adverse processes and trends in development that threaten human health, biodiversity and sustainable functioning of ecosystems, and survival of humankind. U. S. Department of State (2001), defines environmental security as an element of regional and national stability which encompasses the mitigation and prevention of energy threats including threats to sources and supply lines, and environmental risk and related stresses that directly contribute to political and economic instability or conflict in foreign countries or regions. Environmental security has also been defined as relative public safety from environmental dangers caused by natural or human processes due to ignorance, accident, mismanagement or design and originating within or across national borders (Naff, 1992). Environmental security is the freedom from social instability due to environmental degradation (Gleick, 1993).

Environmental degradation for example, has the potential to imperil nation's most fundamental aspect of security by undermining the natural support systems in which all of human activity depends. Conflicts over natural resources such as water and petroleum have been widely reported (Gleick, 1993; Naff, 1992 and Frynas, 2001). All environmental problems do not have the potential of constituting a security threat. However, according to a report on National Security Strategy for the United States (1991), an environmental problem may constitute a security threat, (i) if it creates civil strife or conflict that require the presence of the Army, Navy and/or Air Force (ii) if it undermines any democratic process (iii) if it undermines the legitimacy of government or promotes instability.

In recent years, the Niger Delta area of Nigeria has been engulfed in a crisis of instability caused by protesting oil producing communities agitating for environmental protection and a fair share of the oil wealth generated from their area. From Okoloba to Ogidigben; Ogbotobo to Bonny; Ogoni to Iko; Gbaran to Obagi; Umuechem to Peremabiri; Egbema to Edagberi etc protests of vary degree of manifestation have become a frequent occurring phenomenon. Some of the contentious issues have centered on the payment of inadequate compensation for damages, delays in payments of compensation, delay in responses to spillages, continuous and unabated gas flaring, outright refusal to clean spilled oil, delay in the assessment of impacted areas, failure to provide relief materials, unemployment and the non-provision of developmental projects to compensate for the damages done to the environment and ownership of the location of an oil well or oil field. Thus the oil communities are now pitched against the oil companies and government on one hand and against neighbouring communities on the other hand in a conflict, which not only threaten the oil industry but the corporate existence of the country.

This paper summarizes catalogues of environmental induced conflicts in the Niger Delta area stating their complexity and the cause-effect of the processes involved to further appreciate the risk, uncertainty and longevity. The existing legal structure, control and monitoring programmes for mitigation of environmental pollution as a result of oil and gas activities are also discussed.

Study Area: The Niger Delta

The Niger Delta is located within latitude 5°45' - 6°35' and longitude 4°50' - 5°15' in the central part of Southern Nigeria and has a land mass covering some 70,000 square kilometers which accounts for about 8 percent of Nigeria's land mass (NDES, 2003). Geo-politically, the area comprises of all oil producing states of Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers (figure 1).

The people of the area are a diverse ^fflalgamation of 26 ethnic nationalities with an estimated population of about 20 million in about 800 communities (NDES, 1995). The major ethnic groups in the area include the Ibos, Ijaws, Urhobos, Ogonis, Itsekiris, Isokos, Ibibios, Efiks, Binis, Ikwerres, Kalabaris, Okrikas etc.

The geology of the area is characterized by a vast flood plain built up by accumulation of sedimentary deposits washed down the Niger and Benue Rivers. The geology of the Niger Delta areas has been extensively studied (Akpokodje, 1987 and Allen, 1965). The area is criss-crossed with numerous rivers, streams, tributaries, creeks and creeklets. The vegetation of the area is characterized by the presence of (i) sandy coastal, ridge barriers, brackish or saline mangrove forest; (ii) fresh water swamp forest and (iii) tropical rain forest. The area is the largest wetland in West Africa and one of the largest mangrove forests in the world (Darafeka, 2003).

Previous study (GOBO, 1998), of the meteorology of the area reveals the average atmosphere temperature to be 25.5°C in the rainy season and 30°C in the dry season.

The daily relative humidity values range from 55.5 percent in the dry season to 96.0 percent in the rainy season. Rainfall in the area averages 2500mm annually. The rainfall pattern shows two identifiable seasons, the rainy season (April to October) and the relatively short dry season (November to March).

The Niger Delta area is the home of the petroleum industry in Nigeria with distribution of oil fields as depicted in figure 2. It is estimated that Nigeria earns over 90 percent of its foreign exchange and over 80 percent of government revenue from the petroleum (Okoko and Nna, 1998). The Niger Delta area prior to the activities of oil and gas has abundant and diverse natural resources, good agricultural lands, coupled with flourishing oil palms trees, rubber trees and other economic crops. The forest was extensive with all kinds of animal and plant species (Whiteman, 1982). Herbal medicine practice and other traditional occupation (fishing, soap making, alcohol distillation, canoe carving, mat weaving etc.) flourished (NDES, 2003).

Today, ecological and socio-economic conditions of the area reveal a major departure from the past Oil and gas activities have greatly affected the ecology and socio-economic conditions of the area. The following environmental problems have been identified in the area; depletion of fishing and aquatic resources; depletion and degradation of arable agricultural lands; water hyacinth proliferation; unemployment; oil pollution; gas flare; flooding and coastal erosion, water supply/sanitation, air pollution, soil/land pollution and ground water pollution (NDES, 2003; World Bank Report, 1988 and NDDC, 2001).

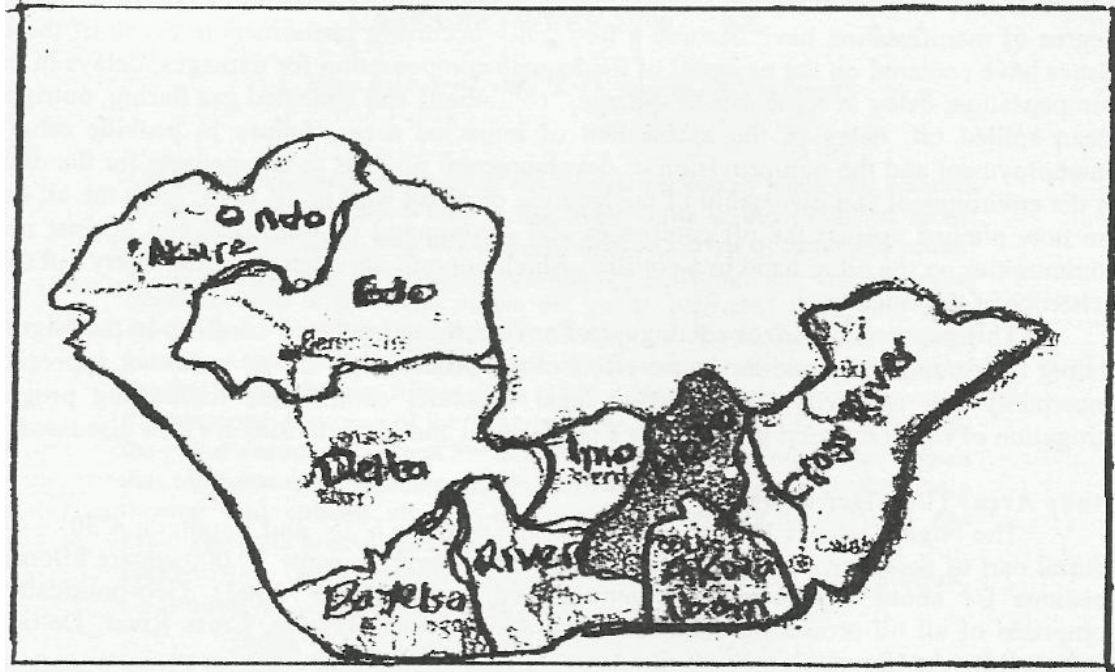


Figure I: Geopolitical Map of the Region

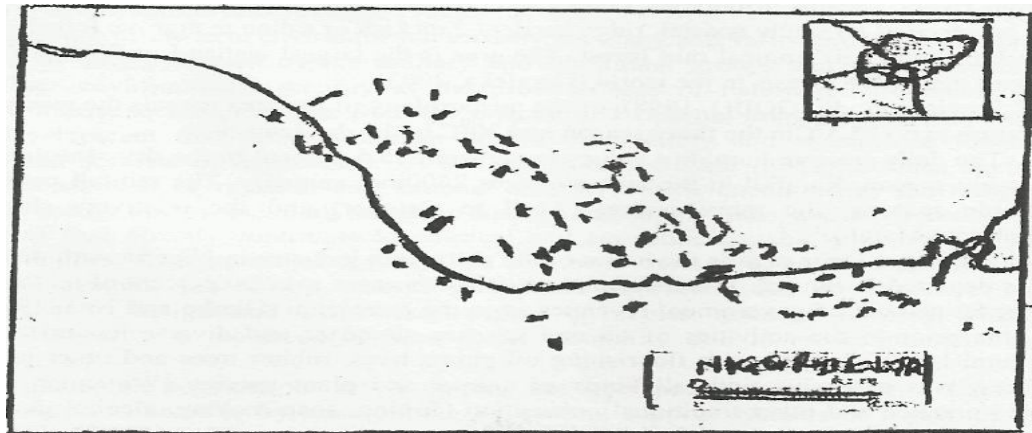


Figure 2: Distribution of Major oil fields in Niger Delta

Environmental Issues and National Security

A topical issue haunting the contemporary Nigerian Nation is the problem of instability in the Niger Delta. At the center of the crisis is the oil producing communities and oil producing companies who are engaged in a conflictual relationship enveloped by palpable hatred. The communities have charged the oil companies of insensitivity centered on the problems occasioned with oil spillages such as; the cleanup of spilled oil, delay in assessment of impacted area and failure to pay compensation for damaged economic crops and fishponds. These issues have caused demonstrations at Odidi, Bonny, Brass, Ogoni, Egbema, Biseni, Ologbobo etc. In many instances, the grievances turned into outright antagonism leading to abduction of company officials, sabotage of company properties and violence against companies. For example, in November, 1990, Urnuchem community in Rivers State staged a peaceful demonstration to voice its complaints of environmental degradation by SPDC. The army was invited to repress the demonstration. At the end of the invasion 100 people were killed and over 495 houses were looted and burnt (NDND, 1991). Also between January, 1993 and March, 1997 the people of Ogoni in Rivers State embarked on series of massive protests to express their concern over their environment. Their complain: their environment has been systematically destroyed by the oil companies which in collusion with successive Nigerian governments, have been stealing their natural resources - crude oil without the people getting commensurate compensations for their losses - unproductive farmlands, polluted waters and general environmental degradation. The event, which followed these series of protest, was the invitation of soldiers. Within these periods over 57 Ogonis sons were killed by soldiers, foreign national were kidnapped, the sovereign existence of Nigeria was threatened (the Ogonis boycotted presidential election), oil activities were disrupted leading to a drastic drop of the country's revenue and the economic loss was conservatively put at 7.2 billion dollars (ICE case study No. 64 1997; Human Right Watch, 2001, and Barinuwa, 1999).

Similarly, between March and April, 1995 about 1,000 women from Apelegbene community of Delta State took over the SPDC (Shell Petroleum Corporation of Nigeria) Odidi oil spillage in their area. Their peaceful protest was repressed by men of the Nigerian Army. The economic loss of the protest was put at 5.6 billion Naira (Amaoru, 1998). In August, 1999 the people Ozoro, Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State staged a peaceful protest over the dumping of toxic chemicals at location 3 Ibo bush in Isoko deep field. The army was

invited and the entire community was sacked. Across most communities in Bayelsa State, the stories are the same. For example, between January and August 1999 at Oloibiri, Gbarantoru, Ikebiri and Tebidaba communities the people has organized series of peace protest (which in most cases has turned violent) against oil companies accusing them of environmental insensitivity. Their complain: our men are now giving up their traditional occupation - fishing. Our rivers have become liability; there are no fishes any more. Oil spilling is killing their only asset - their river. In most of these protests soldiers .were invited to disperse the protesters, some communities have been destroyed and burnt down and several people (over 200) have been killed. SPDC and NAOC (Nigerian Agip Oil Company) crude oil production dropped by 7 percent (Human Rights Watch, 2000; Amnesty International Annual Report, 2004 and Onduku, 2001).

In August 1999, Egi Women's Movement of Rivers State organized a non-violent protest against Elf s activities especially environmental degradation. Elf, invited the army who aggressively break up the protest. Several of them were wounded. Elf production dropped by about 2 percent for a period of about 2 weeks (Amnesty International Annual Report, 2003).

On the 11th of December, 1988, Ijaw Youths of the Niger Delta gathered at Kaiama (the revolutionary headquarters of the Ijaw Nation) to declare resistance against environmental degradation of their land by the activities the oil companies that have been operating in their area for the past 30 years. The signed document "Kaiama Declaration" added a new perspective to the Niger Delta struggle.

Mapping Causes and Effects

From the foregoing, issues such as payment of inadequate compensation, delay in the cleanup of spilled oil, delay in the assessment if impacted areas and the payment of compensation, failure to pay compensation under the pretence of sabotage, the short changing of claimants, the destruction of economic crops, farm lands and fishing grounds and the failure to provide relief materials in times of spillages provided the basis for a detailed causal-path analysis of the links between environmental change and conflict. Many of these problems are casually interrelated. For instance, spilled oil damages agricultural land, fisheries, biodiversity, Forests and pollution of water bodies. The question then is, how will environmental change lead to conflict?)

Environmental degradation caused by oil spill has worsened the economic levels of the Niger Delta people by destroyed the once-abundant fishing grounds and decreased availability of good agricultural land. The overall effect is the further impoverishment it produces on the people. When individuals are poor and fail to find work that is fulfilling and satisfying, they may experience alienation (a pervasive sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement) and the by-product of such experience is an aggressive reaction against the State and it's agent of exploitation. Therefore, the protest have become in view of the people, the only medium of expressing dissatisfaction. The frustration-aggression theory on conflict is consistent with the environmentally induced conflicts experienced in the Niger Delta. Frustration-aggression theory suggests that individuals become aggressive when they feel frustrated by something or someone they believe is blocking them from fulfilling a strong desire. An important subset of the theory suggests that this frustration and aggression can be caused by relative deprivation, when people perceive a widening gap between the level of satisfaction they have achieved (often defined in economic terms) and the level they believe they deserve (Dollard et al, 1973). Seeman, (1959), Marx (1960) and Hamilton and Wright (1986), identified frustration and despondency as products of alienation with conflict as by-product. In addition, the Spillover Model proposes that environmental degradation can lead to social tension, social disruption and eventually armed conflict. That, the possibility of the people having a sense of insecurity is very high , -s a result of the erosion of their traditional occupations (Molvaer, 1991 and Lipschutz et al, 1990). Similar environmentally induced conflicts have been reported, for example, in March 1462 rioters rampaged through Seville after floods forced the price of bread beyond the means of the poor, deforestation in Philippines, land degradation in El Savador and water deficits in the Middle East (Myers, 1989 and Homer-Dixon, 1991 and Porter and Ganapin, 1989).

Legal Prevention and Control of Petroleum Pollution

There exist a lot of environmental laws in Nigeria that has the statutory provisions designed to prohibit of control the pollutions of water, air and land. These provision also prescribe sanctions in the forms of fines, imprisonment or damages to be enforced against persons or companies who flout the provisions. The statutes included the following:

- (i) Mineral oils (safety) Regulations 1963.
- (ii) Oil in Navigable Waters Regulations 1968.
- (iii) Oil in Navigable Waters Act No. 34 of 1968.
- (iv) Petroleum Regulations 1967.
- (y) Petroleum Decree Act 1967.
- (vi) Petroleum (Drilling and Production) Regulations 1969.
- (vii) Petroleum (Drilling and Production) Amendment Regulation 1973 and
- (viii) Petroleum Refining Regulation 1974..

Under the above the Acts and Regulations, specified government agencies such as Department of Petroleum Resources and Federal Environment Protection Agency have been mandated to regulate and control operations affecting the environment. However, the enforcement of these laws and regulations has been bedeviled with a high degree of inefficiency. Therefore, an insight into solving the Niger Delta crisis can start by strictly enforcing the necessary laws and regulations listed above by government and the oil companies.

Recommendations

The importance of the Niger Delta region to the economy of Nigeria cannot be over emphasized and political and environmental stability cannot be taken for granted. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Environmental regular agencies should be strengthened to enforce the implementation of all National environmental laws.
2. Adequate compensation should be paid to the owners of properties affected by oil spill.
3. Oil companies should endeavor to clean within few hours of its occurrence.
4. Obnoxious degree such as Land Use Decree of 1978, that disempowers the owners the land should be abrogated.

Conclusion

From the fore-going, one can deduce that community disturbances in the Niger Delta area, caused by oil spillages is due to the near absence of the benefits of the oil wealth. In this regards, we see as the most likely way out, a high level commitment to environmental protection by government and the oil companies and most importantly a fundamental change in the oil wealth distribution mechanism to ensure that the rewards and burdens of citizenship are shared with equity.

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