



ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO NIGERIA AND OIL – A GLOBAL ISSUE

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ABSTRACT

Most countries depend on oil. States will go to great lengths to acquire an oil production capability or to be assured access to the free flow of oil. History has provided several examples in which states were willing to go to war to obtain oil resources or in defense of an oil producing region. States have even become involved in conflicts over areas which may only possibly contain oil resources. This trend is likely to continue in the future until a more economical resource is discovered or until the world's oil wells run dry. One problem associated with this dependence on oil is the extremely damaging effects that production, distribution, and use have on the environment. Furthermore, accidents and conflict can disrupt production or the actual oil resource, which can also result in environmental devastation. One potential solution to this problem is to devise a more environmentally-safe resource to fuel the economies of the world. Although much of the world depends on the production or the trade of oil to fuel its economies, these activities can cause severe damage to the environment, either knowingly or unintentionally. The environmental damage that is a result of oil retraction and production can also directly effect human life in the region. The Nigerian experience provides telling confirmation of this aspect of natural resources.

KEYWORDS: Development and Growth, Oil Pollution, Hazard, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Crude oil has had profound impact on the world civilization than any single natural resource in recorded history. Oil has become a very decisive element in defining the politics, rhetoric and diplomacy of states. All over the world, the lives of people are affected and the destinies of nations are determined by the result of oil explorations. Oil keeps the factors of the industrialized countries working and provides the revenues, which enable oil exporters to execute ambitious national and economic development plans. The march of progress would be retarded and life itself would be unbearable if the world is deprived of oil. That is why oil has become the concern of governments, a vital ingredient of their politics and a crucial factor in the political and diplomatic strategies yet behind this deification of oil, nothing is said about its impact on the environment. (Altinkaya, 2003).

Nigeria joined the league of oil producing nations on August 3rd, 1956 when oil was discovered in commercial quantities¹ and today ranks as the leading oil and gas producer in Africa and the 6th largest oil exporter in the world. Nigeria is also Africa's most populous nation with over 150 million peoples. As oil was struck in commercial quantities in Nigeria, it also signaled the beginning of a profound transformation of Nigeria's political and economic landscape. Since the 1970s, oil has accounted for 80% of the Nigerian government's revenue and 95% of the country's export earnings. Interestingly, all of Nigeria's oil and gas resources come from its Niger delta region occupied by a mosaic of indigenous nationalities. (Okoh, 2001). The Niger delta sustains the largest wetland in Africa and one of the largest 10 wetlands in the world. . It is also the location of massive oil deposits, which have

been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by multinational oil companies.

The Niger delta consists of a total landmass of approximately 70,000 square kilometers with the third largest mangrove forest in the world, a most extensive fresh water swamp, coastal ridges, fertile dry land forest and tropical rainforest characterized by great biological diversity. Seasonal flooding and sediment deposits over thousands of years have made the land fertile. The immeasurable creeks and streams have in the past, provided habitat for an abundance of fish and marine wildlife. Today the Niger delta is home to approximately 30 million people grouped into several distinct nations and ethnic groups. (Okoh, 2002). Unfortunately, the history of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta in Nigeria is like the history of oil pollution as the commencement of oil exploration and exploitation was followed almost immediately with the four major causes of oil pollution namely, the impact of the seismic survey, gas flaring and oil spills, effluents and waste discharges. (Agbebi, 2004).

What is Pollution?

The word pollution has various meanings. However, under Nigerian law, Section 41 of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act Cap.F10 Laws of the Federation 2002, defines 'pollution' to mean: "***Man-made or man aided alterations of chemical, physical or biological quality of the environment to the extent that is detrimental to that environment or beyond acceptable limits.***" In the specific case of oil pollution, it could be said that oil pollution occurs when the above happens as a result of, or in the course of the extraction, storage or transportation of petroleum oil. It can be seen as the

release of contaminants or pollutants associated with the extraction of crude oil into the environment.

The effects of oil on marine life are caused by either the physical nature of the oil (physical contamination and smothering) or by its chemical components (toxic effects and accumulation leading to tainting). Marine life may also be affected by clean-up operations or indirectly through physical damage to the habitats in which plants and animals live. (Agbebi, 2006). The animals and plants most at risk are those that could come into contact with a contaminated sea surface: marine animals and reptiles; birds that feed by diving or form flocks on the sea; marine life on shorelines; and animals and plants in mariculture facilities. Runoffs from petroleum processing and petrochemical plants have dumped tons of toxic wastes into nearby waters. Gas and oil pipelines have stanchoned many creeks and rivers, swamping prime pastures and cropland. Furthermore, entire bays and lagoons along coasts have been fouled by oil spills and runoff of toxic chemicals. (Onosode, 2003, Okoh *et al*, 1999).

The environmental damage that is a result of oil retraction and production can also directly affect human life in the region. Damage can include pollution of water resources and contamination of the soil. Humans are affected by environmental devastation because it is damaging to vegetation, livestock, and to the health of the human body itself. Oil spills can interfere with the normal working of power stations and desalination plants that require a continuous supply of clean seawater and with the safe operation of coastal industries and ports. Mangrove forests are particularly vulnerable to oil spills because the soils soak up the oil like sponges and re-release it every rainy season. In other cases, the oil prevents the lenticels of the mangrove to absorb oxygen hence oxygen starvation

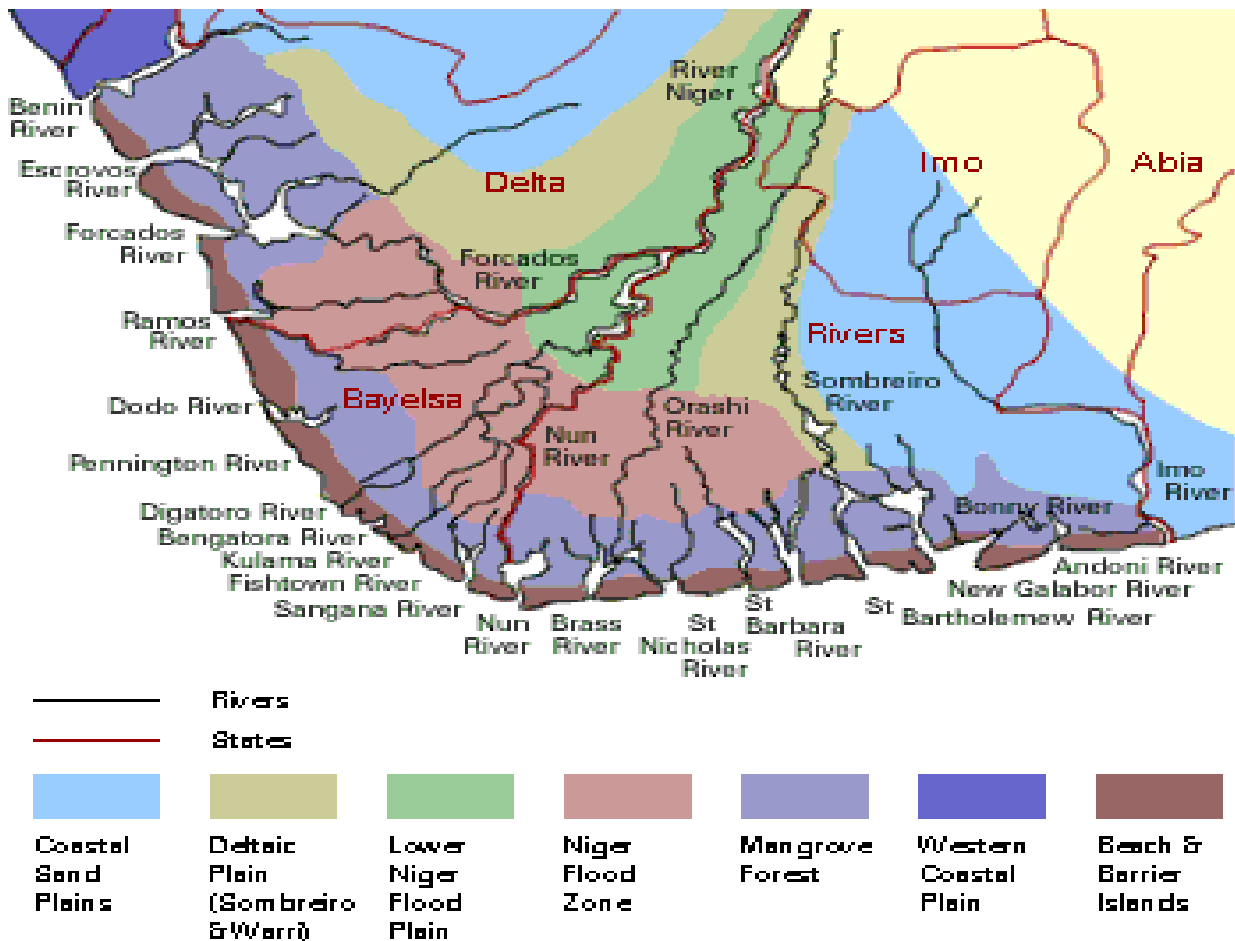
results. The mangrove withers and dies in large numbers due to spill. As the spill occurs, it spreads onto farmlands and water bodies. The toxic crude seeps into the grounds and is taken up by the roots of plants. (Chambers, 1994 a,b,c). Recent studies have shown that oil spills lower soil fertility and cause poor growth of plants. Some natural resources—oil and minerals in particular—exert a negative and nonlinear impact on growth via their deleterious impact on institutional quality. The Nigerian experience provides telling confirmation of this aspect of natural resources. Waste and corruption from oil rather than Dutch disease has been responsible for its poor long run economic performance. The big question now is: Are natural resources a blessing or a curse?

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

Main environmental issues in the Niger Delta of Nigeria relate to its oil industry. The delta covers 20,000 km² within wetlands of 70,000 km² formed primarily by sediment deposition. Home to 30 million people and 40 different ethnic groups, this floodplain makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's total land mass. (CBN, 2000). It is the largest wetland and maintains the third-largest drainage basin in Africa. The Delta's environment can be broken down into four ecological zones: coastal barrier islands, mangrove swamp forests, freshwater swamps, and lowland rainforests. (Agbebi, 2006). This incredibly well-endowed ecosystem, which contains one of the highest concentrations of biodiversity on the planet, in addition to supporting abundant flora and fauna, arable terrain that can sustain a wide variety of crops, lumber or agricultural trees, and more species of freshwater fish than any ecosystem in West Africa.



MAP OF NIGERIA



MAP OF NIGER DELTA

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) describes the region as suffering from “administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict.” This poverty, and its contrast with the wealth generated by oil, has become one of the world’s starkest and most disturbing examples of the “resource curse”.

**Impact of oil exploitation on the environment
Oil spills**

Oil spills in Nigeria occur due to a number of causes, including: corrosion of pipelines and tankers (accounting for 50% of all spills), sabotage (28%), and oil production operations (21%), with 1% of the spills being accounted for by inadequate or non-functional production equipment. (Egbon et al 2000, Imobighe, 1997). The largest contributor to the oil spill total, corrosion of pipes and tanks, is the rupturing or leaking of production infrastructures that are described as, "very old and lack regular inspection and maintenance" A reason that corrosion accounts for such a high percentage of all spills is that as a result of the small size of the oilfields in the Niger Delta, there is an extensive network of pipelines between the fields, as well as numerous small networks of flowlines—the narrow diameter pipes that carry oil from wellheads to flow stations—allowing many opportunities

for leaks. In onshore areas, most pipelines and flowlines are laid above ground. Pipelines, which have an estimate life span of about fifteen years, are old and susceptible to corrosion. Many of the pipelines are as old as twenty to twenty-five years. Sabotage and theft through oil siphoning has become a major issue in the Niger River Delta states as well, contributing to further environmental degradation. (Ndifon, 1998). Damaged lines may go unnoticed for days, and repair of the damaged pipes takes even longer. Oil siphoning has become a big business, with the stolen oil quickly making its way onto the black market. While the popularity of selling stolen oil increases, the numbers of deaths are increasing. In late December 2006 more than 200 people were killed in the Lagos region of Nigeria in an oil line explosion.

Impacts on mangrove forests

Vegetation in the Niger River Delta consists of extensive mangrove forests, brackish swamp forests, and rainforests. The large expanses of mangrove forests are estimated to cover approximately 5,000 to 8,580 km² of land. Mangroves remain very important to the indigenous people of Nigeria as well as to the various organisms that inhabit these ecosystems. Human impact from poor land management upstream coupled with the constant pollution of petroleum has caused five to ten percent of these mangrove forests to disappear. The volatile, quickly penetrating, and viscous properties of petroleum have wiped out large areas of vegetation. When spills occur close to and within the drainage basin, the hydrologic

force of both the river and tides force spilled petroleum to move up into areas of vegetation. Mangrove forests are included in a highly complex trophic system. If oil directly affects any organism within an ecosystem, it can indirectly affect a host of other organisms. These floral communities rely on nutrient cycling, clean water, sunlight, and proper substrates. With ideal conditions they offer habitat structure, and input of energy via photosynthesis to the organisms they interact with. The effects of petroleum spills on mangroves are known to acidify the soils, halt cellular respiration, and starve roots of vital oxygen. (Kepner et al 1996). The oil prevents the lenticels of the mangrove to absorb oxygen hence oxygen starvation results. The mangrove withers and dies in large numbers due to spill. An area of mangroves that has been destroyed by petroleum may be susceptible to other problems. These areas may not be suitable for any native plant growth until bacteria and microorganisms can remediate the conditions. A particular species of mangrove, *Rhizophora racemosa* lives higher in the delta system. As the soils supporting *R. racemosa* become too toxic, a non-native invasive species of palm, *Nypa fruticans*, quickly colonizes the area. This invasive species has a shallower root system that destabilizes the banks along the waterways, further impacting sediment distribution lower in the delta system. *N. fruticans* also impedes navigation and decreases overall biodiversity. In places where *N. fruticans* has invaded, communities are investigating how the palm can be used by local people.

Impacts on fisheries

The fishing industry is an essential part of Nigeria's sustainability because it provides much needed protein and nutrients for people, but with the higher demand on fishing, fish populations are declining as they are being depleted faster than they are able to restore their number. Fishing needs to be limited along the Niger River and aquacultures should be created to provide for the growing demand on the fishing industry. Aquaculture allows for fish to be farmed for production and provide more jobs for the local people of Nigeria. Overfishing is not the only impact on marine communities. Climate change, habitat loss, and pollution are all added pressures to these important ecosystems. Marine and terrestrial habitats are being lost and ecosystems are being drastically changed. The Niger River is an important ecosystem that needs to be protected, for it is home to nearly 350 species of fish, of which about 50 are endemic. With the loss of habitat and the climate getting warmer, every prevention of temperature increase is necessary to maintain some of the marine environments. Oil pollution can be lowered as well; if spills were reduced then habitat and environmental impacts could be minimized. By limiting the devastation caused by disturbances to the marine environment, such as pollution, overfishing, and habitat loss, the productivity and biodiversity of the marine ecosystems would increase.

Water Hyacinth

Water Hyacinth is an invasive species that was introduced into Africa as an ornamental plant, and which thrives in polluted environments. Water Hyacinth has the capability to completely clog the waterways in which it grows, making it nearly impossible to navigate fishing boats. In recent years it has found its way into the Niger River, choking out both sunlight and oxygen to the marine

organisms that live there. When a species such as Water Hyacinth makes its way into the ecosystem, it competes with native plants for sunlight, diminishing energy resources within the marine environment. With the loss of energy some populations will not be able to survive, or their numbers may drop beyond a point of no return, creating a threatened environment. Added to the loss of energy, water hyacinth also takes up and depletes the water of oxygen which is essential to the livelihood of all marine organisms. (Agbebi, 2006).

Natural gas flaring

Nigeria flares more natural gas associated with oil extraction than any other country on the planet, with estimates suggesting that of the 3.5 billion cubic feet (100,000,000 m³) of associated gas (AG) produced annually, 2.5 billion cubic feet (70,000,000 m³), or about 70% is wasted via flaring. This equals about 25% of the UK's total natural gas consumption, and is the equivalent to 40% of the entire African continent's gas consumption in 2001. The reason for this practice, which is universally agreed to be wasteful both economically and environmentally, is that in order to maximize production of crude oil, the associated gas accompanying it is often burned off. This occurs because it is costly to separate commercially viable associated gas from the oil. Even though companies operating in Nigeria also harvest natural gas for commercial purposes, they prefer to extract natural gas from deposits where it is found in isolation. This isolated gas is known as non-associated gas. In fact, in Western Europe 99% of associated gas is used or re-injected into the ground. (Burton, 1987 a&b).

Gas flaring is generally discouraged and condemned by the international community, as it contributes greatly to climate change, which ironically can display its most devastating effects in developing countries like Nigeria, and particularly in the semi-arid Sahel regions of sub-Saharan Africa. The Niger Delta's low-lying plains are also quite vulnerable as they lie only a few meters above sea-level. The flares involve the release of dangerous hydrocarbon mostly methane and others which include sulphurous oxides and the oxides of Nitrogen into the atmosphere. The result of this unchecked emission of gases is the release of 35 million tons of Carbon dioxide and 12 million tons of methane which means that the Nigerian oilfields contribute more to global warming than the rest of the world put together. The flare also raises the temperature of the surrounding environment to temperatures beyond normal of 13-14,000 degrees Celsius and causing noise pollution around the vicinity of the flares.

Another problem associated with gas flaring is *Light Pollution*. Light pollution subjects the living organism around the vicinity of the flare to 24-hour daylight. This affects diurnality and night-time patterns in animals. The flares drive away games, it affects the reproduction of fish as well as sending fish to deep sea areas. The gases released during gas-flaring, mixes with the moisture and other forms of precipitation in the atmosphere to form acid rain. Humans exposed to such substances can suffer from a variety of respiratory problems, which have been reported amongst many children in the Delta but have apparently gone uninvestigated. These chemicals can aggravate asthma, causes breathing difficulties and pain,

as well as chronic bronchitis. Of particular note is that the chemical benzene, which is known to be emitted from gas flares, is well researched as being a causative agent for leukemia and other blood-related diseases. Gas flares are often located close to local communities, and regularly lack adequate fencing or protection for villagers who may risk nearing the tremendous heat of the flare in order to carry out their daily activities. Many of these communities claim that nearby flares cause acid rain which corrodes their homes and other local structures, many of which have zinc-based roofing. Some people resort to the use of asbestos-based material, which is stronger in repelling acid rain deterioration. Unfortunately, this only contributes to their own declining health and the health of their environment. Asbestos exposure increases the risk of forming lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis.

Effluent and Waste discharges.

Another source of oil related pollution is the discharge of effluents into the surrounding environment, sometimes into the water, by the oil companies. For instance, during exploration or seismic surveys by oil companies, drill cuttings, drilling mud and fluids are used for stimulating production. There is also the use of chemicals during seismic activities. The major constituents of drill cuttings such as barytes and bentonitic clays when dumped on the ground prevent local plant growth until natural processes develop new topsoil. In the water, these materials are dispersed and sink and may kill local bottom living plants and animals by burying them. In addition to the pollutants introduced into the environment from exploration and exploitation operations, refinery wastes also have characteristics which constitute potential land, water and air pollutants. The disposal of wastes into the sea from oil facilities has direct effects on fish stocks.

It is the suggestion of this author that Biological remediation can be used to some extent to sanitise the environment. This has been implemented in some areas of the Niger delta to detoxify and restore ecosystems damaged by oil spills. Bioremediation involves biological components in the remediation or cleanup of a specific site. A study conducted in Ogbogu located in one of the largest oil producing regions of Nigeria has utilized two plant species to clean up spills. The first stage of cleanup involves *Hibiscus cannabinus*, a plant species indigenous to West Africa. *H. cannabinus* is an annual herbaceous plant originally used for pulp production. This species has high rates of absorbency and can be laid down on top of the water to absorb oil. The oil saturated plant material is then removed and sent to a safe location where the hydrocarbons can be broken down and detoxified by microorganisms. The second stage of bioremediation involves a plant known as *Vetiveria zizanioides*, a perennial grass species. *V. zizanioides* has a deep fibrous root network that can both tolerate chemicals in the soil and can also detoxify soils through time, requiring little maintenance. The people of Ogbogu hope to use these methods of bioremediation to improve the quality of drinking water, soil conditions, and the health of their surrounding environment.

CONCLUSION

It could be seen from the above that the externalities of oil extraction have resulted in profound adverse impacts on

the lifestyles and livelihood patterns of the affected community and on the environment in the Niger Delta where unchecked oil exploration and exploitation had taken place for the past forty years. The oil companies has not in anyway helped matters as they continue to flout environmental regulations in their areas of operations and pay less attention to environmental protection regimes that would have helped to abate oil pollution. The government on its part has not shown any commitment to enforcing the minimal environmental laws which it created.

To abate these adverse effects which oil pollution have had on the affected Communities, the oil companies and the government should show more commitment to the use of abatement procedures and environmentally sound and cleaner technologies for oil exploration and exploitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) All draconian laws concerning oil, gas and land-use that exclude indigenous peoples from participation in the control and use of their resources be abrogated or amended. The 1978 land use Act and the 1969 Petroleum Act (in Nigeria) should be repealed immediately as recommended by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The government should take urgent steps to restore the right of communities to some measure of control over their resources.
- (2) A multi-stakeholder approach to oil exploration and exploitation should be put in place involving the triad of government, oil companies and host communities. The multi-stakeholder mechanism should address issues of biodiversity conservation and regeneration.
- (3) Oil and gas matters which are currently put on the exclusive legislative list should be removed and put on concurrent list to enhance partnership and collaborative decision making involving the oil companies, government and host communities. This will provide more choices for the people.
- (4) The government of Nigeria should muster the political will to exact stricter respect for environmental laws and regulations by oil companies and a penalty plan established that require oil companies whose activities cause excessive pollution or are ill-equipped, to forfeit their licenses.
- (5) Oil companies should be made to pay greater respect to the implementation of judicial pronouncements on their activities. A case in point is the recent judgment by a Federal High Court in Nigeria that all oil companies in Nigeria should stop gas flaring.
- (6) An insurance fund against oil pollution be established by the government and the oil companies. In this fund, all the socio-economic costs resulting from oil pollution, can be charged and insured against.
- (7) A rapid oil spill response mechanism be put in place by the government and oil companies which must be committed to responding to communities in distress due to oil spills
- (8) The government should require oil companies to provide all the necessary social infrastructures before the commencement of oil exploitation so that their operations will not impact negatively on the immediate local population.

Economic growth and development in relation to oil in Nigeria

- (9) The current compensation regime in Nigeria has to be reviewed for it to be fair and adequate to meet the emergency needs and concerns of those affected by pollution.
- (10) The water situation in Goony and the Niger Delta should be declared a national emergency requiring massive investment in the provision of alternative water supplies.
- (11) As required by Article 8f of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the government and Shell Petroleum Development Corporation should embark on the massive rehabilitation and restoration of the degraded Ogoni ecosystem and promote the recovery of threatened species. To this end, the Nigerian government, as a signatory to the Convention, should keep to its obligation under the Convention by embarking on an environmental audit of Ogoniland as recommended by the Secretary-General's Fact Finding team to Ogoni in 1996.
- (12) Multilateral donors and other development actors should design an operational policy guideline which could provide the basis for assisting Nigeria and other countries, to integrate environmental concerns and indigenous rights in their national development policies.
- (13) However bleak this situation may seem for the Niger Delta region there are clearly alternatives that can be implemented to save it from future contamination. Satellite imagery combined with the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) can be put to work to quickly identify and track spilled oil.

To hasten the cleanup of spills, regional cleanup sites along the problem areas could help contain spills more quickly. To make these tasks feasible more funding must be provided by the stakeholders of the oil industry. Nongovernmental organizations will keep fighting the damaging effects of oil, but will not win the battle alone.



A woman beside an oil well in the Niger Delta area



The impact of oil pollution on the vegetation in the environment



Oil pollution has damaged crucial sources of livelihood for communities of fisherman

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