

OIL EXPLORATION AND ITS IMPLICATION ON THE RURAL FARMERS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implication of oil exploration on the rural farmers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The main objective is to examine the impact oil exploration on the farmers in the rural area of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The Frustration-Aggression theory and the Relative Deprivation theory were used to provide academic foundation to this study. It was revealed that the forceful acquisition of land by both the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies have greatly reduced the land for agriculture in Niger Delta. This has negative effects on agricultural production and the available food produced. The problem is compounded by incessant oil spillages and flaring of gases that affected the growth of crops and its productivity. It was discovered that the high cost of food in the Niger Delta is also attributed to crop destruction by oil spillages laying of pipes and flow stations flaring of dangerous gases and the acquisition of so many hectares of land by oil multinational companies. It was therefore recommended that commensurate compensation should be paid to the land owners whose lands were used for oil exploration activities, and flaring of dangerous gases to close to human habitation should be stopped because it has adverse effects on their health and crops.

Keyword: Rural farmers, oil exploration, flaring of gases, oil spillages and livelihood.

1. Introduction

License to explore oil was given to shell D. Arcy Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria in 1923. It was a construction of Shell Petroleum Development Company that was later changed to shell B.P. According to Asuru, Amadi, Osu and Wosu (2018) Shell B.P, in the pursuit of commercially available petroleum found oil in Oloibiri in Ijaw, Afam and Bomu in Ogoni territory, all in Nigeria. Production of crude oil began in 1957 and in 1960, a total of 847,000 tons of crude oil were exported. The license to explore oil was also given to non-British firms, such as Agip in 1962, SLF in 1962, Texaco in 1960, Mobil in 1955 and Chevron in 1961. All these oil multinational companies concentrated their exploring activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, where oil was found in commercial quantities.

According to the Niger Delta Development Commission (2006) the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is one of the world's largest wetlands and includes by far the largest mangrove forest in Africa. Its biological diversity is of global significance within the extremely valuable

ecosystem, oil activities are widespread. It is an obvious fact that before oil was discovered in commercial quantities in the late 1950s in Niger Delta region, agriculture was the main stay of Nigeria economy. Each region specializes in the production of their respective cash crops that were our sources of revenue. The Northern part of Nigeria specializes in the production of groundnut, western Nigeria was in charge of the production of cocoa while Eastern Nigeria specializes on the production of palm oil and kernels.

Nna and Ibaba (2011) posits that Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) on behalf of the NNPC/Shell/SLF/Agip joint venture operates oil mining leases (oryl's) covering an area of 31,000 square kilometers and produces nearly half of the nation's oil of some 20 million barrels per day. To this, it operates an extensive net-work of about 900 producing oil wells; 100 flow stations, some 45,000 kilometers of oil and gas flow lines and over 1,500 kilometers of trunk lines. Onuha (2004) asserts that since the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria, it has steadily replaced agriculture as the main foreign

exchange earner for the country.

Deedam (2023) succinctly put that since oil was discovered in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, there has been constant flaring of dangerous gases such as methane, sort, carbon mono-oxide close to human habitation. Oil spillage and environmental degradation are common features of the Niger Delta environment. All living creatures are exposed to danger as their natural habitats have been destroyed by the activities of the multinational oil companies. The rural farmers have been adversely affected, fishing activities grounded and aquatic life destroyed as a result of the after effects of oil exploration. Deedam (2023) further buttressed that most fishes have been killed by incessant oil spills, even the crops planted as well as other terrestrial animals were destroyed. The local economics of the Niger Delta people have collapse, and poverty has increased tremendously as most of their youths are unemployed. The peasants who specialized in farming, fishing, hunting and sometimes lumbering have been greatly affected by environmental degradation emanating from oil exploration.

Okoko, Nna and Ibaba (2006) posit that given the enormous wealth generated by the oil companies, the communities had expected that their wretched state of living will be transformed, they thought their communities will experience development and poverty will be eradicated. Paradoxically, their state of wretchedness worsens; as their local economics collapsed, poverty was exacerbated and unemployment jumped to roof tops. In addition to the above, Ekanem (2010) succinctly put that the Niger Delta land had been ravaged through oil exploitation, the women had been raped by soldiers, their leaders had been murdered and youths stained by state security operations. The trans-national companies operating in the region carry out their operations without due consideration being given to the quality of living of the people in the area, with their deteriorating living condition, deprived means of livelihood through pollution of their sources of water (rivers), destruction of their

farmlands through spillages from oil pipelines and exploration activities.

Operationalisation of Concepts

To avoid all forms of ambiguities, the following concepts will be clearly explained- as thus,

Oil Exploration: This has to do with the embodiment or totality of oil operation by the multinational companies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

Rural farmers; they can be seen as the entire peasant farmers in the rural areas of Niger Delta. These groups of people have been adversely affected by the activities of the multinational oil companies.

Multinational Oil Companies: These are foreign oil companies such as Shell Petroleum Development Company, Nigeria Agip Oil Company, SLF, Chevron, Texaco etc that specialized on oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Environmental Degredation: This has to do with the destruction of the ecosystem as a result of the activities of the multinational oil companies which has effects on the inhabitants of the region.

The Impact of Oil Exploration on the Rural Farmers

According to Ojimba (2006) the negative effects of crude oil pollution on crop production included the reduction of farm lands cultivated, decreased in crop output and decline in revenue accruable to farmers which in turn, impoverished the farmers. Constant depredation of rural resources such as land, forests, rivers, sea and destruction of crops as a result of oil exploration activities reduces the productivity of the rural farmers, who rely on these resources for their economic sustenance and well-being on daily basis. Niger Delta people are constantly experiencing oil spillages every year in great magnitude. These spillages reduced the available farm lands for cultivation; this has succeeded in increasing their poverty level and hardship. Attempt by the oil producing communities to force them to pay compensation and to carry out remediation work always resulted to conflict. Human rights watch, (1997) clearly stated that oil

spill kills fish and agricultural crops, and pollute water, with serious effects for the communities and families affected. Okoko, Nna and Ibaba (2006) stated that poorly designed cause ways and canals of the oil industry affect the hydrology of the seasonality flooded fresh water swamp and the blackish water of the mangrove forest, killing off crops, destroying fishing grounds, and damaging drinking water supplies.

Oil spills are not always properly taken care of by the oil multinational companies. In some cases, remediation services are usually delayed as a result of administrative bottleneck, conflict between them and the host communities, fear of compensation, difficult terrain etc. so the spilled oil is left at the mercy of tidal wave, which carry it into the mangrove forest, rivers, and creeks and even land that are kilometers away from the spilled spot. To substantiate the above argument, Okoko, Nna and Ibaba (2006) made it clear that the above reference is true of Akenfa, Ogoloma and Edagberi communities (where spilled oil was left uncleaned for 3 to 9 months) and Bonny, Oporoma, Nembe, Ogibidgbe, Okerenkoko and Diebiri, where the oil spilled was left to the care of tidal waves. Deducing from the facts and evidences presented above, the rural farmers are at the receiving end because their crops were massively destroyed, and farm lands submerged. This led to shortage of food, increase in hunger and poverty among the families in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This ugly scenario also motivated their children (youths) to engage in oil bunkering and kidnapping so as to make earns meet.

Another adverse effect of oil exploration and spillage is that it reduces the available land for crop cultivation. Reduction in the plots of land also reduces the quality of food produce and the income of the rural farmers.

The various communities in the Niger Delta have accused the multinational oil companies for failure to carry out clean-up exercise, destruction of economic crops, farmlands, rivers, creeks and fishes, failure to provide materials to victims of oil spillage and delay to clean impacted sites.

They have failed woefully to implement their environmental protection policies. This non-challant attitude displayed by the oil multinational companies generated tension which led to several crisis between them and the oil producing communities. They rose up against them at one time or the other over the above problems, Bodo, Peremabiri, Oloibiri, Bonny, Uzere, Umuochem, Odidi, Oporoma, Kula, Bille, Ke, Olugboro, Otuasega, Oborroma, Rumuekpe, B-Dere, Idama, Krakrama etc.

Apart from oil spillage, constant flaring of gases closed to human habitation also has hazardous effects on human beings and their crops. The emission of excess Carbon monoxide, sooth and methane into the atmosphere resulted to health hazard on human beings. It has been confirmed by medical practitioners that constant flaring of gases into the atmosphere reduces life expectancy of the people because they are exposed to several diseases emanating from it. According to Okoko, Nna and Ibaba (2006) studies have shown that there is a 10 percent loss in yield for crops about one kilometer away from the flare site; 45 percent loss for those about 60 metres away, and about 100 percent loss for all crops cultivated about 200 metres away from the flare site. Equally, evidence points to the fact that economic trees (palm tree, cotton tree, mahogany tree, etc) have withered away due to gas flaring in Ogboloma, Akenta, Oporoma, Otuasega, Onyoma, Ikobi and Oben in Edo state; and Erhoike and Uzere in Delta State.

In similar vein, Ojimba (2023) demonstrated that the largest estimated economic loss incurred during survey occurred as a result of pipelines laying (& 43, 741.23) accounting for 26.46% of the total estimated economic loss of \$165.287.10. Other estimated crops values lost due to the acquisition of crop farms for flow stations sites was \$36.387.92 (22.02%), oil well sites \$31.334.67 (18.96%), borrow pits, and 26.531.63 (16.05%), gas flaring sites, %10.485.63 (6.34%).

Naanem (1995) describes the pathetic situation as thus;

Evidence of environmental disaster is conspicuous throughout the areas of terrestrial and aquatic vegetations have been destroyed by oil spills, marine life for which the vegetation provides a life support system has largely disappeared with the vegetation

Deedam (2023) asserts that the peasant farmers have little or nothing to sell since their crops are not yielding well, while the fishermen roam the length and breadth of their rivers and succeeded in catching small quantity of fish. This situation is pathetic and it is a clear indication of neglect and marginalization. To worsen the situation, social amenities such as electricity, portable water, standard hospitals, roads, bridges to connect the several islands and villages are not there.

This situation was appropriately captured by Wumi, Ayodele and Akinsola (2000) as thus;

Even at the peak of the false boom in the country, the oil producing areas of the country, modern infrastructure such as road, medical facilities, electricity etc are virtually absent in these communities. To make matters worse, the extraction of oil over the years has taken a rather high toll on the ecology and environment of the areas. The traditional economic activities of the areas such as fishing and farming have been ravaged by pollution and environmental degradation associated with oil extraction.

Reactions by the Oil Producing Communities against the Multinational Oil Companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria

From the late 1950s when oil was discovered in commercial quantities to the early 1980s, the oil producing communities and the multinational oil companies had a cordial relationship. Both parties depended on the same lands, waters, lakes, forests and bushes for their sustenance. The host communities in the Niger Delta expected that their living condition would have improved, considering the enormous revenue generated by these oil companies. Unfortunately, poverty, unemployment, hunger,

diseases and environmental degradation are now common features of the Niger Delta (Deedam, 2023).

Nna (2000) posits that most communities in the Niger Delta feel strongly that they do not have a fair share of oil revenue given to the country. After more than 30 years of oil production from their land, they consider their standard of living poor. This high level of environmental degradation, neglect, exploitation, poverty and lack of basic infrastructure motivated the people of Niger Delta region to agitate and demand for autonomy, share of the resources from their land, employment, adequate and timely compensation, timely clean-up of oil spills and provision of infrastructure that will make life more meaningful to them. They decided to embark on legitimate, peaceful and non-violent struggle, which entails the following:

Peaceful protest and demonstrations.

Writing of petition to the federal government, the international headquarters of the multinational oil companies and the United Nations.

Lobbying.

Propagation

After the above peaceful means of settlement have been exhausted and nothing tangible were done to improve their standard of living, the youths of the Niger Delta region decided to engage in illegal and unconstitutional means to address their helplessness, deplorable conditions, perpetual bondage and abysmal poverty. Hence, they decided to engage in vandalization of oil pipes oil wells, bunkering and kidnapping of expatriates and the local workers. Formation of several militia groups seem to be the last option carried out by the youths since all aspects and demands made by them fell on deaf ears of both multinational oil companies and the federal government. Groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Federated Niger Delta Ijaw communities (FNIC), Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF), Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV) and People's Liberation Force (PLF), Dey well, Dey gbam, Green Landers, Ice Landers etc sprang up to

destroy and truncate oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta region.

Several peaceful protests were carried out by different ethnic groups, communities and organizations so that payment of rents, royalties and timely payment of compensation can be actualized. These peaceful protests and demonstrations turned into violent conflicts between the host communities and the multinational companies and law enforcement agencies (Deedam 2023). Several communities were destroyed and unestimated numbers of persons were killed in Umuechem in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, Odi community in Bayelsa State, Ogoni ethnic nationality was under siege from 1993 to 2000, Bonny in Rivers State, Izombe in Imo State, Egbema, Obaji in Rivers State etc. All these reactions led to violent confrontation which resulted to the death of so many people and destruction of properties, making the environment or region to be hostile and uncomfortable for business and settlement.

Area of Farmland Acquired for Oil Exploration

The length of oil and gas pipelines used in the Niger Delta region alone was 7000 kilometers, spread over a land area of 31,000 square kilometers in over 1,500 communities (NDDC, 2006). This is a clear indication that greater proportion of the land in the Niger Delta has been used for oil exploration and transportation of crude oil, it also means that the available land left for the farmers are small, and their total productivity or output are also small. This has contributed to high cost of agricultural

products in the region, since the farmers are no longer producing the quantities they ought to produce. To worsen the situation the population of the region is increasing on daily basis as a result of increase in industrialization and urbanization, which created opportunities for youth employment and acquisition of skills. The quantity of food available is small and insufficient compared to the teeming population in the region; hence food is supplemented with manufactured noddles such as indomie, macrony, spaghetti etc. food in the Niger Delta is also supplemented with food from Northern Nigeria and foreign rice.

Shortage of land in the Niger Delta was best described by Amanye (2003) as thus;

Ogoni land is seriously short of land. Whereas UN agencies estimate that each person requires 4 acres of land for survival, the Ogonis only have 0.5 acre per person. More land taken for industries, access roads to the oil fields and pipelines with right of way. This is a catastrophic situation. The Ogoni has nowhere else to go.

According to Osuji (1998) and Ojimba (2023) each oil field is a collection of oil wells. This implies that an oil field could have as many as 46 oil wells as is the case in Bomu, all of which could be producing depending on the capacity of a flow station of individual oil well. That is how large areas of arable lands are acquired for these large scale oil exploration activities.

<i>Table 1: Area of farmland acquired for oil exploration activities in Rivers State.</i>	Over all	%	Average Farmland acquired (ha)	Standard Deviation (ha)	Minimum Value (ha)	Maximum value (ha)	CV.%	Ranking
Flow Station Sites	146.92	21.51	2.80	1.53	0.30	10.00	83.93	2 nd

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Oil Well Sites	138.89	20.34	2.83	1.64	0.50	16.00	57.95	3 rd
Gas Flaring Sites	48.10	7.04	2.19	0.75	1.00	7.00	34.25	6 th
Borrow Pits	102.98	15.08	1.84	1.01	0.30	8.00	52.06	4 th
Pipelines Laying	172.14	25.21	2.03	1.25	0.10	8.00	61.58	2 nd
Others	73.88	10.82	2.01	1.01	0.20	11.00	50.50	5 th
Total	682.91	100						
Mean	113.82		2.30	120	0.40	10.00	51.71	

Source: Ojimba, T.P (2011) *African Research Review*; 5 (2), 279-292

The figure on table I above clearly shows that a total of 682.91 hectares of farm have been acquired by the multinational firms operating in Rivers State between 2002 and 2003 for crude oil production. A total of 146.92 hectares of land which constitute 21.57% were used for flow station sites, while a total of 138.89 (20.34%) were used for oil well sites. A total of 48.10 (7.04%) have been used for gas flaring sites, while 102.98 (15.08%) have been used for borrow pits. A total of 172.14 (25.21%) have been used for pipelines lying, while 73.88 (10.82%) was used for other oil exploration activities.

The analysis above shows that more lands are used by the multinational companies than the land used by the rural farmers. The large hectares of land acquired, deprived the rural farmers from having enough farms to cultivate. The peasant farmers are more pauperized and impoverished as a result of the large hectares of land forcefully taken from them by both the Federal Government and the multinational companies.

The peasant farmers solely depend on land for their sustenance and the reduction of this land has reduced their revenue and living condition. This same situation is similar to what is happening in all other states in the Niger Delta where oil exploration is taking place.

It has also been confirmed that there is a correlation between forceful acquisition of land

by the multinational oil companies/Federal Government and violent conflict that had existed between them and the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta. This ugly situation forced the people of Niger Delta region to take up arms against the oil companies and the police who came to protect and secure oil pipes, oil wells and flow stations. These violent conflicts that arose as a result of neglect, deprivation, environmental degradation, unemployment, high rate of poverty and lack of infrastructure have increased tremendously and got to its climax before amnesty was granted by the Federal Government to some of the militants specialized in oil pipes vandalism and illegal refineries. It can also be concluded from this argument that conflicts arose in the Niger Delta because the livelihoods of the peasants or rural farmers were adversely destroyed and some of their farm lands forcefully taken from them without compensation.

After the destruction of their natural resources and the forceful acquisition of their land, employment was not given to them, neither were they trained in any specialized skills that can put food on their table. They were left to wallow in object poverty arising from unemployment and forceful acquisition of their main source of livelihood. The occupation of the rural farmers, fishermen and those who engage in lumbering activities have been truncated and destroyed, and they are left poorer and

miserable than the way they were.

2. Theoretical Framework

Frustration-Aggression Theory

This study is anchored on the frustration-aggression theory that was propounded by John Dallard, Neil Miller, Mower Sears Doob in 1939. This theory holds that frustrated people tend to be more aggressive than those who are not frustrated. Hence, they exploit and make use of all available opportunities to vent their anger or react against their oppressors (Schefer, 2005).

Douglas, Steven and Robert (2010) stated that people who are aggressive elicit negative reactions from others. They emphasized that frustration can increase the probability of an aggressive behaviour. The theory holds that people react aggressively when prevented from actualizing desired goals. In this context, the rural farmers in collaboration with other groups in the Niger Delta region have been frustrated as a result of long years of deprivation and exploitation of their resources without any reasonable form of compensation. Their main sources of livelihood (farming and fishing) are adversely affected as a result of constant flaring of dangerous gases, oil spillages and acquisition of their land. They became frustrated as their sources of livelihood have been destroyed, so they decided to be aggressive by attacking oil pipelines, oil wells and flow stations as well as engaging in illegal refineries.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation theory is defined as the conscious feeling of negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities. A relatively deprived person is dissatisfied because he or she feels downtrodden relative to some appropriate reference group. (Schaefer 2005).

The deprived people feel that they deserve better living condition than what they are experiencing, and that they have the legitimate and constitutional right to actualize their goals without interference from any group of people.

They mostly feel deprived when compare

themselves with other privileged groups or class of people, this ugly scenario, always motivate them to form social movement against the groups that are responsible for their deprivation. The social movement is sometimes peaceful and also antagonistic.

Relative deprivation theory was propounded by an American sociologist known as Robert K. Merton whose study of American soldiers during the second world war unveiled that soldiers in the military police were not satisfied, as they were not promoted as at when due like other group of armies. This concept was popularized and expanded by Samuel Stouffer in 1949. The rural farmers in collaboration with all the people of Niger Delta region expressed dissatisfaction over their present deplorable condition caused by the multinational oil companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria. They have organized several associations both legal and illegal, ones to address their high level of deprivation and environmental degradation caused by oil exploration. Unfortunately their problems have not been addressed; hence anger, conflict, poverty and poisonous environment are common characteristics of the region.

3. Recommendations

The following recommendations were provided as panacea to the problems identified.

Commensurate compensation should be paid to the land owners (farmers) whose lands were used for oil exploration activities.

Oil spillages should be cleaned up immediately so that it will not extend to cover large hectares of land including rivers, creeks and swamps. Timely intervention will definitely reduce its adverse effects on the land, crops, fishes, water and other animals and trees.

Adequate and commensurate compensation should be paid to the land lords immediately after the evaluation of the impacted sites have been done to avoid conflict.

The farmers should be given credit facilities by the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies so that they can engage in other economic ventures that can put food on their table.

The multinational oil companies should stop flaring of dangerous gases within the communities in the Niger Delta. These gases that are emitted on daily basis have adverse effects on the health of the inhabitants and their crops.

The Federal Government should introduce rural agricultural programmes that are sustainable and will be capable of transforming the lives of the rural farmers as well as increasing food production.

4. Conclusion

The ecology and the environment of the rural farmers changed tremendously as soon as oil was discovered and explored in commercial

quantities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The environment is highly polluted as a result of oil spillages and flaring of dangerous gases close to human habitation. The farm land, crops, trees, streams, creeks, rivers, aquatic creatures, animals and man are greatly affected. Food production is reduced because some hectares of land have been forcefully taken for oil exploration, while oil spillages are also affecting the growth of crops. The rural farmers are stranded as their main sources of livelihood (farming and fishing) are adversely affected. Their wretchedness and helplessness increased tremendously as they find it difficult to feed their families. They no longer have any source of income because of the activities of the oil exploration companies. This ugly scenario and condition has generated a lot of conflicts between the rural people of the Niger Delta Region and the Federal Government and the multinational companies on one hand.

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