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## Incessant theft of crude oil products in Niger Delta region: A key role to environmental devastation

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### Abstract

The study investigated Incessant Theft of Crude oil Products in Niger Delta Region with a view to determining effective approaches to curb its environmental impacts within the environs. The target population of study comprised twenty-four (24) operational gas and oil projects in Niger Delta region. Both primary and secondary sources of data were employed to evaluate the magnitude of crude oil theft using qualitative research design. The study was guided by the theory of environmental sustainability and transformation theory which stressed on the inseparable nature of man-environmental relationship. The study noted among all that the region is the hot-bed of crude oil deposits in Nigeria which had culminated to indiscriminate alteration of crude oil products in the form of illegal bunkering by militants, some stakeholders, and few inhabitants of the region for sustainability. The research recommends among all an effective formulation of policies and environmental monitoring strategies to curb perpetrators activities of endangering both lives and properties in other to enhance development.

**Keywords:** incessant, theft, crude oil, Niger Delta, devastation, environment

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### Introduction

Niger Delta Region is one of the major regions found within the enclave of Nigeria and is described as a unique ecological zone by virtue of its size and geological configuration (Nmon, 2003) <sup>[11]</sup>. It is a zone endowed with abundant natural resources for human sustainability. For effective policy framework and planning purpose, the region encapsulates all oil producing communities in the country with emphasis to areas considered pertinent for administrative convenience, political expediency as well as developmental objectives (Ile & Akukwe, 2001) <sup>[6]</sup>. The region expands a political boundary of approximately 75,000km<sup>2</sup> and comprised of nine (9) States namely; Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers State, together with 185 Local Government Areas which are divided into 800 communities and 40 different ethnic groups (Ile & Akukwe, 2001) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Sequel to recent contemporary development in the evolution of mineral deposit in the region, crude oil (petroleum and natural gas) has evolved as the most relevant mineral discovered in large quantity all over the region. It occurs in large underground reservoirs nomenclated "oilfields" and is found in huge commercial quantities within the region and has served till date as a major export earnings of the nation (UNDP, 2006) <sup>[22]</sup>.

However, several investigations conducted on this capacity implicitly show-cased that the first oil was struck in 1956 at Oloibiri (Bayelsa State). Shortly afterwards, operations migrated to Port Harcourt area where Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) discovered a major oil well after the former in fast succession especially in areas like: Egbema, Bomu, Owaza, Umuechem, Igwuruta, Ogoni, etc. Although, the Nigeria civil war disrupted several activities in various oil field location points which were situated in Niger Delta region (Odomerie, 2011) <sup>[13]</sup>.

Significantly, the discovery of oil in commercially exploitable quantities at Oloibiri (Bayelsa State) in 1956, Ogoni land (Rivers State) has transformed the industrial landscape of the region to become the mainstay of Nigerian economy (Oyegun & Akpoghemeh, 2009) <sup>[15]</sup>. This recent development has fascinated numerous multinational oil investors and firms to the region for massive exploration. Against the backdrop of the creation of Rivers State in 1967 coupled with government embargo on absolute relocation of oil firms to various production areas had proliferated development all over the region with new oil and gas installation. The most devastating issue within this epoch lies on incessant theft of this products and pipeline vandalization by both militants and residents which had impeded growth and development of the oil sector in the region (SPDC, 2003) <sup>[20]</sup>.

Accordingly, Niger Delta Development Master Plan (2006) <sup>[10]</sup> indicated that lots of hydrocarbon infrastructure exist in Nigeria with over 7,000km pipelines in the region which spanned across 289 flow stations. This has

constituted tremendous industrial development with oil and gas resources by a way of extensive transport and communication, port expansion coupled with rapid development in areas like Lagos, Abuja, Enugu, Kano, Port Harcourt, Warri, Calabar and Eket.

Admittedly, majority of the residents of the region (Niger Delta) and few stakeholders have indiscriminately culminated to exploit petroleum products as a personal means of survival in the form of illegal bunkering in collaboration with pipeline vandalization consequent upon absolute negligence and marginalization of the indigenous residents of the Niger Delta regions that had accounted to youths' restiveness; whereas resources (oil) used in developing other parts of the nation is extracted from their locality. This activity had exacerbated to the ambit that hoodlums and angry militants whose interest and daily commute is on this venture had got out of hand and the perpetrators usually refine these products illegally and locally in an attempt to manufacture fuel, kerosene and diesel which the content cannot be tantamount to those refined industrially by experts and as such, enhances fire explosion popularly known and addressed as (Kpom-fire). Again such illegal products are contained in nylon bags, dirty drums and tankers which are adjusted to trucks from point of intercept to various destinations. Its negative effects had necessitated acute deplorable condition of most tarred roads whose surfaces are wide-spreaded by crude oil from tankers thereby constituting pot-holes and hollows on major roads as an attribute of road accident which sometimes claims numerous lives and properties thereby subjecting such vehicles conveying them on abatement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study explored two theories to expand its volume of literature: the theory of environmental sustainability and transformation theory.

#### **The Theory of Environmental Sustainability**

This theory underpins appropriate measures of subjecting the social environment of man to a modest form of living. It critically expressed that lack of effective planning and programme had devastated many Nigerian cities into slums and ghettos hence, the key challenges in the housing sector encapsulates: land degradation, pollution, whelming flood, erosion, desertification, inefficient use of energy resources, loss of biodiversity, environmental disaster and deforestation (Onyeike, 2010) <sup>[14]</sup>. The theory emphasized on capacity building in urban environmental planning and management on broad-based partnership and participation as well as leveraging technical and financial resources to eradicate urban environmental deficit which bedeviled most resident in urban cities. By sustainability, we actually meant the tendency to keep in existence for support hence, environmental sustainability implies absolute means of configuring civilization and human ability to ensure societal and economic achievement of desired needs thereby expressing utmost potential in the present and preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystem for proper planning of future generation.

Consequently, Federal Government of Nigeria established the Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) in 1998 with a view to protect oil related matters with emphasis to Niger Delta region. In compliance with the trend, the report of the Association of American Geographers Taskforce on Environmental Quality, in collaboration with the inception of the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement (NESRA) in 2007 necessitated quick actions on massive attempts to compressively plan our urban environment (Nwala, 2020) <sup>[18]</sup>.

To check the trend, government of Rivers State undertook a state wide urban renewal programme in an attempt to ameliorating environmental sustainability approach which the Greater Port Harcourt City Development Authority (GPCDA) project was a major underpinning agenda despite its failure. This project was comprehensively planned with residential accommodation for 30,000 Housing Units for Phase 1A (Rivers of Possibilities, 2013) <sup>[19]</sup>.

#### **Transformation Theory**

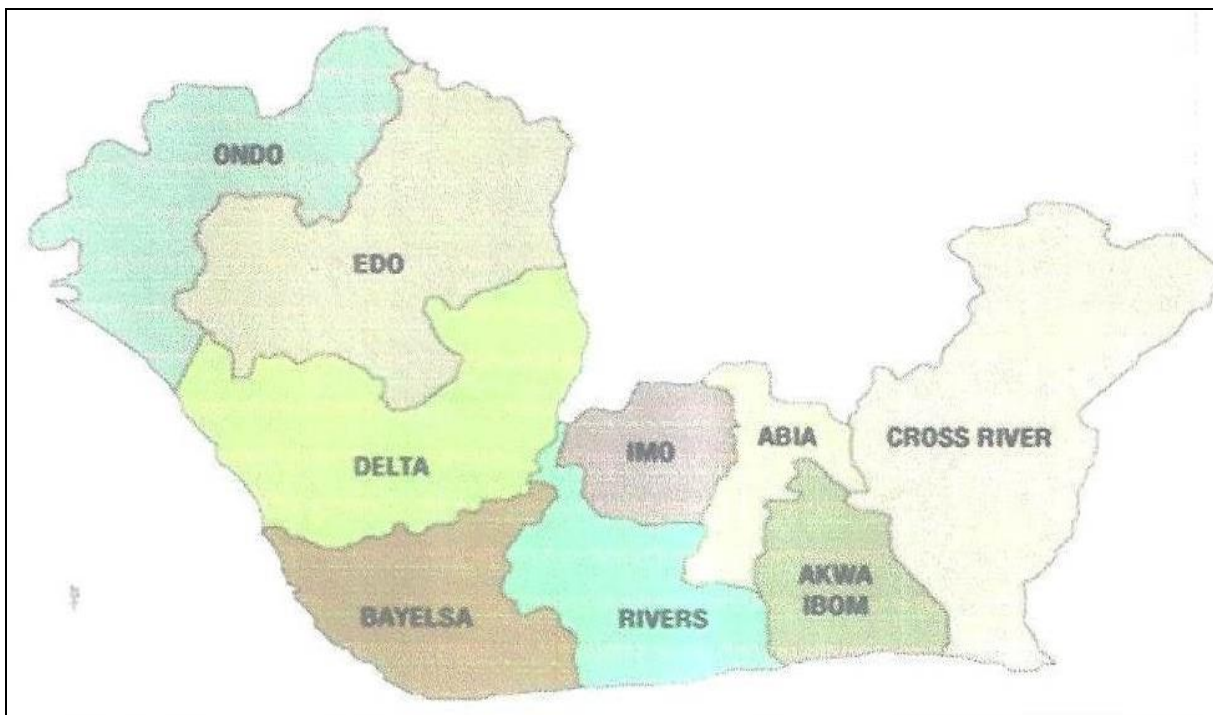
This theory argued that regional imbalance is an attribute of systematic/structural injustice and inequality hence, expressed by competing socio-economic and political framework (Utulu, 2013) <sup>[23]</sup>. On the above submission, Bell-Gam in Poronakie (2015) <sup>[16]</sup> asserted that leaders do not generally appropriate a uniform commitment to economic development of the country rather, pay deaf ear to the devastating nature of resources which can be used in fast-tracking development. Corroborating this fact, Nwala (2019, p. 28) reported: "transformation through advocated pertinent strategies of rejuvenating worn-out resources mainly renewable once that enhances man-land relationship in the societal world.

#### **Materials and Methods**

Sequel to Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan (2006), the Niger Delta Sub-region of Nigeria is fan-shaped and is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in the world after Mississippi and Panama. It is located between Latitude 4°North and 6°North of Equator and Longitude 5° and 9°East of the Greenwich Meridian (GMT) (Naluba, 2017) <sup>[8]</sup>. The South-North is expressly defined by the Great Atlantic Ocean in the South to Agboh (Delta State) in the North and R. Forcados at a city called Obotor. The East-West extension is from the boundary of Bonny R. to Sapele in Delta State (Tamuno, 2007). The region is majorly located on the Southern hemisphere of the country and covered approximately 70,000km<sup>2</sup> thereby representing about 12% of Nigerians total surface area (Jonathan, 2004) <sup>[7]</sup>.

Over 31 million inhabitants (22.3%) of Nigerian population with oil and gas industries inhabited 5% of the region (Adeyemo, 2008) <sup>[1]</sup>. The region is greatly associated with crude oil and is extremely heterogeneous hence, divided into five major linguistic and cultural entities. The region is basically made up of eight (8) distinctive States of Bayelsa, Abia, Delta, Imo, Edo, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom and Ondo State, respectively. The Niger Delta Region is a rainbow-like dune in which numerous ethnic nationalities have a home. The core Niger Delta States comprises such States like; Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa and Akwa-Ibom, while other peripherals (political) entities includes those of Ondo, Abia, Edo and Imo State (Tamuno, 2000). The interaction between the people of Niger Delta and the outside world dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries when Portuguese explorers migrated to the Kingdom of Bonny in Rivers State, Warri in Delta State and Benin in Edo State (Barrette, 2008) <sup>[2]</sup>. Evidences of the interaction are still found in the language and customs of the people and in the costumes and artifacts found within the area. The region is a petroleum-rich region and has ever been the Centre of International Controversy over environmental degradation as well as corruption/militancy and human right violation (Naluba, 2017) <sup>[8]</sup>.

### The Physical Setting of Niger Delta Region Map of the Niger Delta Region



Source: Digitized from Rivers State Ministry of Land and Housing, Port Harcourt

**Fig 1:** Study Area indicating Niger Delta States and Capitals

### Result and Discussions

Basically, the average daily production of oil is over 2 million bpd from 254 producing fields, while a total of 1,183 oil fields have been discovered with 145 oil concessions operational and 143 are left open (Nwilo & Badejo, 2008) <sup>[12]</sup>. Hence, Licensed Oil Companies in the region proliferates from one (SPDC) in 1964 to eleven in 2005 which have been subjected unto extensive alteration by pipeline vandals and illegal oil bunkering by most residents within the region. As a result, the position of oil and gas sector in the overall economic growth and development is overwhelming and devastating.

**Table 1:** List of Operational Gas and Oil Projects in Niger Delta Region.

S/No	Project	Operating Company
1.	Obiafu/Obrikom Gas Plant	NAOC
2.	Nigeria Liquefied National Gas Plant	NLNG
3.	Obite Gas Plant	EPNL
4.	Oso NGL Plant	EXXON Mobil
5.	Bonny River Terminal	EXXON Mobil
6.	Eleme Petrochemical Plant Limited (EPCL)	EPCL
7.	Warri Petrochemical Plant Limited (WRPCL)	WRPCL
8.	Soku Gas Plant	SPDC
9.	Oyigbo-North Gas Plant	SPDC

10.	Imo River Gas Node	SPDC
11.	Agbada Gas Node	SPDC
12.	Carothrone Channel Cryogenic Gas plant (CCCCGP)	GRL
13.	Carothrone Channel AGG Plant	SPDC
14.	Eastern Gas Gathering Systems (EGGS) Phase I	SPDC
15.	Soku Gas De-bottle necking	SPDC
16.	Akogep (Phase) II	EPNL
17.	Agip IPP (kwale/Okpali)	NAOC
18.	Odidi AGG	SPDC
19.	Bonny NAG Plant Expansion (BNAG)	SPDC/NAOC/ELF
20.	NLNG Train 4 & 5	NNPC
21.	Offshore Gas Gathering & Systems	SPDC
22.	EScravos Gas Project (EGP) 3A Onshore	CNL
23.	Olero Creek/Dibi Development	CNL
24.	EScravos Gas To Liquid (EGTL) Project	CNL

Source: Adapted from Chukwueke (2006) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Table (1) above indicates the List of Operational Gas and Oil Wells in Niger Delta Region where acute Pipeline Vandals and Incessant Theft of Crude Oil Projects are observed.

**Table 2:** Niger Delta Oil and Gas Infrastructure and Production Related Activities.

S/No	Project	Operating Company
1.	Percentage (%) Contribution of Crude Oil Export to National Forex earnings.	over 80%
2.	Average daily Crude oil Production	2mbpd
3.	Number of Oil Wells drilled in Niger Delta	5,284
4.	Number of Flow Stations for Crude Oil Processing	289
5.	Length of Oil and Gas Pipelines in the region	over 7,000 km
6.	Number of Export Terminals	10
7.	Land area within which Network of Pipelines are located.	31,000 km <sup>2</sup>
8.	Number of Communities Hosting Oil/Gas facilities	over 1,500
9.	Number of Petroleum Training Institute in the region.	1
10.	Number of free export/industrial Zones in the region.	2
11.	Number of Gas Plants in the region	24
12.	Number of Marginal Oil Fields formed out of Local Companies.	159
13.	Number of Crude Oil Production Companies in the region.	11

Source: Adeyemo (2008) <sup>[1]</sup>.

The information on Table 2 above revealed the Analysis of Oil and Gas Infrastructure and Production related activities of numerous operational projects in the Niger Delta region. Accordingly, the average daily production of oil and gas in the entire region is over 2 million barrels per drum, while percentage contribution of crude oil export to national earnings is over 80%. This indicates that Niger Delta region and its communities have great contributions over the national foreign exchange earnings in the oil sector.

Similarly, the country's crude oil is associated with gas, and such development exists in the oil and gas sector. Thus, Chukwueke (2006) <sup>[4]</sup> asserts that "there is an indication that gas could eventually overtake oil in the economic potential in the nation. Consequent upon the world economic growth, changing energy markets, significant environmental advantage over oil and Gas including advancement in technology". He further contended that Nigeria will realize from Gas twice the current realization from crude oil industry. Based on this analysis, it becomes obvious and self-explanatory to conclude that the region is absolutely devastating hence, it is blessed abundantly with natural resources but in terms of economic wellbeing, the region is exogenously imposed and endogenously marginalized (Poronakie & Gbegeh, 2016) <sup>[17]</sup>.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Petroleum products as an aspect of Hydrocarbons (Crude Oil) have played significant roles in Nigerian's foreign exchange earnings. The products have been tampered indiscriminately by most residents of the region at an alarming rate. Adversely, its illegal form of refining had constituted severe environmental hazards ranging from health impairment, fire disaster, road deterioration and loss of lives on major roads that linked the region with their neighbouring States.

Above all, technological advancement had generally enhanced man's ability to alter environmental resources rapidly to suit his wants and aspiration. Having comprehended the situation to be dehumanizing and inhumane, it is against the backdrop that the concept requires an effective and efficient regulatory policy framework in terms of environmental governance that advocates not only equitable development strategies and social justice, but

integrate vital components of transparency as controlling mechanisms to the menace arising from man-environmental relationship.

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