

Oil Terrorism and Politics of Environmental Protection in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Conflict Revisited

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Abstract: *The commencement of commercial production of oil at Oloibiri, Bayelsa state in 1958 brought with it pipeline system attacks and seizure of oil barges, oil wells, flow stations, support vessels and other oil facilities by militants. The deliberate acts of terror are aimed at getting the attention of government to some challenges which require political solution, particularly the need to protect the environment frequently degraded as a result of the activities of the oil companies operating in the region. Today, the Niger Delta people who once enjoyed safe ecosystem in the pre-crude oil era are confronted with serious threats to their health and source of livelihood. More so, there is perceived complicity of government in the unending conflict. This study therefore seeks to examine the issues surrounding oil terrorism and environmental protection in the Niger Delta region. Specifically, it seeks to find out how oil resource has contributed to environmental-protection challenge in the Niger Delta region, what factors exacerbate oil terrorism and environmental-protection challenge in the region as well as the practical solutions that can effectively end oil-related conflicts in the region. The study is anchored on regulatory capture theory while qualitative approach is adopted for data collection and analysis. Among other things, the study found out that environmental degradation persists as a result of weak regulatory approach by government. It equally found out that the oil companies operating in the region have successfully captured the regulators and continued to engage in unending flouting of the extant environmental-protection laws. In view of the findings, the study recommended the need for strict regulation against compromise of collective interest in the region. It also recommended the setting up of local surveillance team of activists with a responsibility to independently provide quarterly report to government on matters pertaining to the environment.*

Key words: *oil terrorism, Niger Delta, environmental protection, pollution, militants.*

Introduction

Nigeria has a strong and reputable position in global oil business. It is one of the largest producers of oil in Africa and the seventh in the world, a status which she attained as a result of the preponderance of naturally-endowed oil deposits within her boundaries, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Instructively, the Niger Delta region remains Nigeria's backbone as far as oil

production is concerned. It is located in the Atlantic coast of the south and is adjudged the world's second largest delta with a coastline of about 450 kilometres.

Year 1956 was significant in Nigeria's oil discourse. It is when Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell) discovered crude oil at Oloibiri in present Bayelsa state with commercial production of oil commencing in 1958 [1,2]. Today, the Delta region produces over 90 percent of the oil extracted in Nigeria [3] where states that include Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa top the list as major producers of crude oil.

Scholars have argued with available evidence that the economy of Nigeria largely depends on the petroleum and this resource has often determined the direction of the country's annual budget. It is in that light that the country effectively justifies its classification as a rentier state whose major source of foreign-exchange earnings is through the sale of petroleum. In an agreement with this truism, [4] aptly noted that the petroleum industry in Nigeria is practically the most significant source of revenue. Equally, [5] supports the position that petroleum production and export play a dominant role in Nigerian's economy and account for about 90 percent of her gross earnings where oil and gas alone generated 40 percent of Nigeria's national Gross Domestic Product over recent decades.

The depth of crises arising from the blessing of oil for Nigeria has remained unresolved. Several agitations and avalanche of militancy have worsened environmental health of the region while creating a frustrating smudge for the country's economy. It is therefore in the light of this unending discourse with regards to the oil terrorism and politics of environmental protection that this paper was conceptualized, with a prime objective to examine the correlations between the contending variables underlying the study.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, Section 1 of the Nigerian Petroleum Act vests the entire ownership and control of all petroleum in, under or upon all land or Nigerian territorial waters in the federal government. What this means is that the federal government reserves right of control and exploitation of the oil resources as can be found within the geo-political space of the country. By extension and as Section 20 of the Nigerian constitution 1999 (as amended) strictly provides for, the government equally has the responsibility to protect and improve upon the environment. In essence, it is responsible for guaranteeing public safety on water, air, land, forest and wildlife. Simply put, state's sovereignty over the natural resources necessitates the mandate for environmental protection for the government. It is in this same regard that Section 2 of the Nigerian Environmental Impact Assessment Act prohibits both the public and private sectors of the economy from undertaking or embarking on authorized projects or activities without first considering and investigating the impact of such on the environment.

Regardless of these provisions, the discovery and production of oil in Nigeria has created environmentally-related conflicts. The magnitude of environmental degradation and ecological depletion in the oil-producing states of Nigeria has continued to generate public debates and resentments, same way it has thrown up certain health concerns. Arguments have been adduced to the fact that Niger Delta people that once enjoyed safe ecosystem in the pre-crude oil era are today confronted with serious threats to their health. In essence, crude oil exploration in the region has become a major source of health hazard and consequential deaths. It has become a curse to the people.

As [6] rendered it, situation of things in the area is currently characterized by contaminated streams, rivers, forest destruction and biodiversity loss. The situation prevails despite the series of efforts by the government as well as the oil companies towards ensuring that oil spills in the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta are tamed. The reality, however, is that reckless oil extraction has damaged the environment of the Niger Delta region in no small measure while the oil companies operating in the area have consistently shown total disregard for the issue of environmental health [7]. In all ramifications, there appears to be a ploy by the actors in the oil and gas business to undermine environmental wellbeing of the region.

Practically, the dimension of the challenge is such that oil frequently stops floating on the water's surface but sink into the marine environment, thereby creating damaging effects on the underwater ecosystems, while in turn killing or contaminating fish and smaller organisms that are essential links in the global food chain. Such situations result in death of marine mammals such as whales, dolphins, seals, and sea otters. Available data revealed that Texaco extensive oil spill, for instance, killed 2,800 sea otters, 300 harbour seals.

Many factors obviously account for the politics underlying environmental protection in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In particular, [4] placed the blame, first and foremost, on the doorsteps of sabotage and vandalism. However, it has become clear that other factors account for this situation, which this study set out to interrogate.

Research Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to examine the correlations between oil terrorism and environmental protection in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Its specific objectives are:

1. To investigate how oil resource has contributed to environmental-protection challenge in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.
2. To examine the factors that exacerbate oil terrorism and environmental-protection challenge in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.
3. To proffer practical solutions which can effectively end oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study formulates the following research questions to serve as a guide:

1. How has oil resource contributed to environmental protection challenge in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria?
2. What factors exacerbate oil terrorism and environmental-protection challenge in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria?
3. What practical solutions can effectively end oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria?

Methodology

The study was anchored on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Data were generated from secondary sources and analyzed using descriptive-qualitative method.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Regulatory Capture Theory propounded by George Stiger in 1970s. Other proponents of the theory include Richard Posner, Joel Hellman, Daniel Kaufmann and Johan de Hertog. The central task of the theory on regulatory capture is to explain who will receive the benefits or burdens of regulation, what form regulation will take as well as the effects of regulation upon the allocation of resources [8].

Essentially, regulatory capture stands to mean the capture of regulations by the regulated. The capture refers to the active and passive behaviours by responsible authorities directed at protecting the same illegal, unethical, immoral or anti-public interest practices that those authorities are charged with policing. At a first level of capture, the regulator allows the regulated to breach the law, ethics, good practice, moral principle or public interest which the regulator is responsible for upholding. At a second level, the regulator assists the regulated to escape the regulatory consequences after the act. At a deepest level of development, the capture is so complete that the regulator may assist the regulated to defeat the regulatory regime before the fact [9].

Stigler argued that the regulated industries maintain a keen and immediate interest in influencing regulators. He contended that even though the rules in question, such as pollution standards, often affect citizens in the aggregate, yet individuals are unlikely to lobby regulators to the degree of regulated industries, thereby paving the way for the regulated industries to devote large budgets towards influencing regulators at federal, state and local levels. In view of the circumstance, individual citizens with very limited financial power spend only limited resources to advocate for their rights, since they are not able to match the financial strength of the supposedly regulated industries.

In reality, the theory argues that the regulatory agencies which are controlled by the industries they are charged with regulating are known as captured agencies. The theory, thus, argues that government rather chooses to advance the commercial or political concerns of special interest groups or large industries that dominate the sector they are charged with regulating, contrary to its original purpose of establishment. When such regulatory capture occurs, the theory contends that the interests of firms, organizations or political groups are prioritized over the interests of the public, leading to a net loss for society.

Regulatory capture theory therefore suggests that regulatory capture largely takes place as a result of the fact that groups or individuals who possess significant and high-stakes as well as vested interests in the outcome of policy or regulatory decisions often channel their resources towards influencing policy outcomes that are favourable to them. Through that, they successfully achieve the capturing by influencing the members of the regulatory commission or agency, to the

extent that the preferred policy outcomes of the special interest groups are promoted and implemented accordingly.

[8] argued that an industry can benefit from regulation if it can capture the regulatory agency involved. In view of this, regulation deviates from benefiting public interest to becoming a process by which interest groups seek to promote their private interest [10]. This, thus, provides a wide ample of opportunity for the regulatory agencies to be subjected to perpetual domination by the industries regulated, thereby rendering the agencies incapable of representing public interest.

[10] in his exposition listed notable industries involved in such capture to include those in energy, communications, transportation and banking businesses. He argued that the capture is achieved by way of constant romance as well as gift/bribe giving and taking between the government agencies and the industries, maintaining that rather than promoting efficiency, the regulating agencies create an efficient environment for profit maximization for industries.

The regulatory capture theory is apt for this study which examines oil terrorism and the politics of environmental protection in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. There is no gainsaying the fact that government's efficiency in enforcing environmental regulatory laws is greatly expected in view of the huge pollution caused by oil explorations in the region. However, evidence shows that such an expected enforcement of laws has become a mirage, such that enforcement is either weak or absent, to the detriment of the people who directly feel the consequential impacts of the polluted environment. As it stands, the establishment of agencies (such as the National Oil Spill Detection and Regulatory Agency) against environmental pollution has failed to achieve the aims owing to the apparent capture of the agencies by the oil industries. It is in view of this that the adoption of the regulatory capture theory as framework of analysis becomes apt.

Literature Review

Oil Terrorism: An Overview

The contributions of oil to the advancement of both the economy and humanity have been subjected to sound intellectual scrutiny over time. Lens of intellectualism tend to focus, not only on the positive dimensions, but equally on the negative aspects in order to balance the argumentative exercise. In fact, there is a consensus today that oil has equally become a curse, contrary to the blessing orientation of the previous years. It is in that light that it has become pertinent to move along the intellectual direction of categorizing the unconstructive potentials of the oil resource as terrorism.

For instance, there is no better way to conceptualize the escalation of oil-pipelines vandalisation and other related destruction by militants. Although the masterminds of the conflicts claim to suffer untold marginalisation in the hands of government, they have, indeed, become a strong factor in the crime of sabotaging, not just development but standard of living of the people in the region. Besides, oil terrorism has passed as a new lexicon introduced by security analysts and scholars to describe the deliberate pipeline system attacks mostly in Iraq and elsewhere in the world by militias, freedom fighters and insurgents [1].

Several incidences have shown that oil terrorism thrives in Nigeria. In fact, the depth of oil terrorism in the country is more alarming and dangerous. Acts such as the blowing up of oil pipelines, installations and other platforms with explosives are regular occurrences. They equally include acts such as seizure of oil barges, oil wells, flow stations, support vessels and other oil facilities in order to prevent the exploitation and distribution of crude oil or its refined products. These acts are obviously deliberate, with clear motive to draw attention to some multi-dimensional challenges which require political solution. The perpetrators aim to inject fear in the system in order to attract the attention of the Federal Government to the plight of their region. As a matter of fact, the militants who are responsible for the act of terrorism have succeeded in holding Nigerian government hostage, thereby causing enormous haemorrhage to the Nigerian economy. They have, as well, continued to do so.

The resultant effect of the oil terrorism not only manifests in the area of environmental degradation. Majorly, the situation has put Nigeria under pressure of sort over her development. [11] in assessing the situation affirmed that it amounts to misnomer today to say that Nigeria has witnessed development as a result. His observation makes much sense when one takes into account the high incidences of poverty, unemployment and inequality bedeviling the country. But in order to address the threat of oil terrorism to national security, [12] noted that the federal government always made a huge allocation to security, an action which culminated in the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011 by the National Assembly. Be that as it may, insecurity in the country remains on the increase [13].

Oil and Dilemma of Environmental Pollution in Niger Delta

Of all the effects posed by oil terrorism in the Niger Delta, pollution of the environment by oil companies remains at the heart of the challenge. That single epidemic has brought about a clear distortion of the people's pre-colonial economic activities [14]. As evidence shows, the natural environment has become badly affected with attendant consequences on the communal economic activities of the people who originally and chiefly involved in fishing, hunting and farming. It has been observed that the environmental problems associated with oil production in the Niger Delta include the contamination of nitrogen, phosphorous and sulphur which are useful for the preservation of soil nutrients and fertility. Others manifest in forms of widespread air, water and soil pollution; the creation of mountainous waste as well as the depletion of resources that cannot be replenished. These environmental problems equally pose a wider threat to health through climate change. This shows that climate change and its negative effects are traceable to oil related human activities [5].

Undoubtedly, the challenge of environmental protection rests on the shoulders of government to tackle. In particular, protection of the communities in the Niger Delta from oil-related activities is the primary responsibility of the Federal Government, failure of which results in crises. What this implies is that statutorily, the federal government is both in total control of oil exploration and production in Nigeria as well as ensuring an effective protection of the environment. This is what the 1999 Constitution provides for. In its Section 20, the constitution states that the state shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air, land, forest and wildlife of Nigeria [15].

Regardless of the provision, illegal or unauthorized activities that result in the destruction of petroleum, gas and chemical pipelines persist [16]. In fact, the act of tampering with oil pipelines and installations has assumed huge dimensions and a variety of forms in Nigeria. Oil bunkering, oil theft, pipeline vandalisation and fuel scooping, indeed oil terrorism have become rife with fresh threats still emerging [1]. It has been argued that pipeline vandalism or illegal and deliberate destruction of pipelines for personal gain disruption has over the years become an integral part of oil and gas operations in Nigeria. As a result, the Niger Delta region has been messed up by oil spills mainly caused by the activities of vandals.

Pipeline vandalism in particular has far-reaching implications on the petroleum supply chains. Apart from the huge product losses, environment equally suffers. This trend continues regardless of the efforts by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), the Department of Petroleum Resources, (DPR) and the Nigerian police Force, (NPF) to tame the tide [17].

On the other hand, oil spill has proven not to be a natural phenomenon but an incident that takes place as a result of human activities such as pipelines destruction for personal interest. The oil pipeline vandalism has been perpetrated principally by criminal syndicates who are motivated by the desire to steal oil products for material gains [18]. This results in fire disasters which destroy cash crops and financial losses sometimes running into several billions of dollars [19].

For instance, in 1995 there were only seven reported cases of vandalisation, but it grew in the next three years from 33 to 57. In 1999 alone, there were a total of 477 recorded cases of pipeline vandalism in Nigeria. However from the number in 1999, it increased to 909 cases in 2000 and further increased sharply to 2 258 cases in 2005 [20]. Between 2010 and 2012, total of 2,787 lines breaks were reported on pipelines belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), resulting in a loss of 157.81 metric tons of petroleum products worth about N12.53billion [21]. In the same vein, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), in its report disclosed that 700,000 barrels of crude oil per day were lost in 2016 to pipeline sabotage.

Unemployed youths have been accused as being the agents of pipelines vandalisation in Nigeria, operating in remote areas where oil pipelines pass. Thus, they were involved in puncturing or destruction of pipes while taking advantage of ruptured or leaking pipes to siphon fuel or other petroleum products into drums, plastic containers or storage cans for sale at the black market.

Today, there have been changes regarding oil pipelines vandalisation and fuel scooping. Evidence shows an increase and intensification in the rate of oil pipeline vandalisation since Nigeria's return to democracy.

In the contemporary days, there have increasing allegations of complicity and connivance between oil marketers, traditional rulers, politicians, security agents, and NNPC staff in the growing incidence of vandalisation in Nigeria. [22] reported suspected vandals confessing that a certain politician provided arms and other logistics for vandalisation of pipelines in 2006. Equally and sadly too, it has been found that the more the government, through her security agencies, devised means of protecting the oil facilities, the more the vandals improved on their operations to beat even the modern technologies used in fortifying the oil pipelines and installations [23].

Oil Resource in Niger Delta, a Curse?

An issue which has agitated the minds of stakeholders has centred on the effects which oil resources in Niger Delta have had on the general aspects of life of the people. In essence, there

has been sustained discourse on this subject matter. This is partly as a result of the increase in militancy in the region as well as the fact that the poor environment of the region has never witnessed any significant redemption.

Obviously, the impacts of oil-related pollution are multi-faceted. For instance, oil spill alone has contributed to lots of human rights abuses in the region. As [5] rightly observed, the livelihoods, health and access to food and clean water of hundreds of thousands of people in the Niger Delta are closely linked to the land and environmental quality. All of these are comprised when oil spills occur since such incident causes damage to both the soil and water system. The resultant effect is that women, men and children living in the region have to drink the polluted water, cook with it and bath with same. By extension, the people eat fish contaminated with the oil and other toxins and as well farm on the contaminated land.

It is on records that the air which the Niger Delta people breathe after oil spill reeks of oil, gas and other pollutants. Before long, the people start to complain of breathing problems, skin lesions and other health problems. In fact, Amnesty International [24] highlighted the major human rights impacts of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta to include the following:

- i. violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food as a consequence of the impact of oil-related pollution and environmental damage on agriculture and fisheries.
- ii. violations of the right to water which occur when oil spills pollute water used for drinking and other domestic purposes.
- iii. violations of the right to health which arise from failure to secure the underlying determinants of health, including a healthy environment, and failure to enforce laws to protect the environment and prevent pollution.
- iv. failure to ensure access to effective remedy for people whose human rights have been violated.
- v. failure to provide affected communities with information relating to oil spills and clean-up.

Oil and Interminable Conflicts in Niger Delta: Assessing Prospects for Peace

There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria has become the hub of oil-related conflicts. This assertion makes much sense when the incidences of conflicts in the region are taken into proper account. Although there is much to rejoice about the gift of nature in the form of crude oil, yet same resource has, as well, brought tears to the people. These are characterized by forceful occupation of flow stations, vandalization of pipelines, kidnapping of oil workers, bunkering and concomitant stealing of crude oil as well as conflicts between militants and government's security forces.

Clearly, what began as an idealistic struggle by Niger Delta youths to protest cases of unemployment, pollution and inadequate political compensations has fast degenerated into exploitative abductions and other similar crimes. It is in this light that [25] argued that Niger Delta militancy was caused by grievances and greed. While [26] was of the view that the state of insecurity has led to a reduced volume of investments and capital flow to the region, it is imperative to state that the failure by the security agencies to adequately cover locations of the various oil facilities in the region has created a veritable ground for illegal oil bunkering to thrive.

Instructively, several of the militant groups are involved in illegal oil bunkering which, itself, has become a major source of funding for the operations of the militants. It is suspected that the militancy is a lucrative means of armament for militants while the public suffers great losses. For instance, Nigeria which was placed as 40th best global destination for foreign direct investment between 2007 and 2009 witnessed monumental decline of investment from \$20bn in 2007 to \$8.28 in 2009, and further down to \$6.1billion in 2010. Apart from that, several oil and non-oil businesses have shut down operations due to militancy attacks, with one of them, Shell, evacuating about 235 non-essential oil staff, causing its oil production to reduce by 30,000 barrels per day in 2003 when Niger Delta People Volunteer Force relocated to the creeks and begun attacks on oil installation [27]. Available data equally reveal that cases of kidnapping increased from 66 cases in 2010 to 36 in 2013 and 3,931 in 2014 [28].

Fear of kidnapping forced Julius Berger to abandon project sites including the contracts for the construction of roads like Kaiama-Port Harcourt, Ogbia-Nembe-Brass, Yenagoa-Oporoma roads [29]. In 2013 alone, N1.72 trillion was lost by Nigeria due to oil theft. In the same vein, the NNPC recorded a cumulative loss of N418.97 billion between January 2015 and September 2016, which represents 27.7 percent decline in crude oil production from 2.16 million barrels daily in first quarter of 2015 to 1.60 million in the third quarter of 2016 while the monthly loss from 69.49 million barrels, the highest monthly recorded in October 2015, to 46.56 million barrels, the lowest recorded in August 2016 [30]. This singular reason forced Nigeria to fall behind Angola as Africa's leading oil exporter in 2016 [31]. Other negative impact of oil terrorism in the Niger Delta was the incapacity of the federal government to finance its national budget. The 14 trillion revenue loss to militancy between 2003 and 2008 covers more than two years annual budget of Nigeria while the N1.5 trillion revenue loss to the Niger Delta militant group, Avengers alone in 2016 is equivalent to 24.8 percent of the N6.06 trillion 2016 budget [30].

The implication of these oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta is the necessity for a lasting peace in the region. This is important so as to amass the full benefits of the abundance of the natural resources for the transformation of the lives of the population and the society at large. Notably, some efforts and policies have been executed in that direction by previous and current administrations within the existing regulatory frameworks. However, it is important to interrogate whether these interventions have succeeded or otherwise. It has become a task to conduct an appraisal of the situation with a view to forging a lasting solution to the conflicts. In essence, one may be forced to ask, have interventions by government in the area of environmental protection in the Niger Delta succeeded or clogged?

Environmental Pollution and Politics of Interventions: The Niger Delta Experience

Several efforts have been directed towards finding a lasting solution to the problem of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta region. Specifically, there are facts which affirm that the Federal Government, oil companies operating in the region as well as some non-governmental agencies have made several efforts to provide some levels of intervention, part of which is the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 1990) that provides guidance for government and industry on oil spill prevention, mitigation, clean-up and liability [32]. In particular, the provisions by the Act were targeted at reducing the number of spills, followed by reducing the quantity of the oil spilled. It equally created a comprehensive scheme to ensure that sufficient financial resources were available to clean up the spill and for compensations.

In similar manner, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Decree No 86 of 1992 was promulgated with the aim of providing protection to the environment. The decree made the development of an EIA compulsory for any major project that may have adverse effects on the environment. Among other things, it sought to address any impactful environmental issues, regardless of whether they have direct or indirect, short term and long term effects, as well as to identify possible available measures in order to mitigate negative environmental conditions. It is in the same vein that the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo upgraded the defunct Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) to Federal Ministry of Environment. This was aimed at checkmating the adverse impact of oil and other human and natural activities on the ecosystem [33].

The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) was equally set up with the responsibility of managing oil spills in Nigeria. The establishing Act specifies that the Agency shall:

- i. be responsible for surveillance and ensure compliance with all existing environmental legislation in the petroleum sector including those relating to prevention, detection and general management of oil spills, oily wastes and gas flare;
- ii. enforce compliance with the provisions of international agreements, protocols, conventions and treaties relating to oil and gas and oil-spill response management and such other related agreements as may from time to time come into force;
- iii. receive reports of oil spillages and co-ordinate oil spill response activities throughout Nigeria;
- iv. co-ordinate the implementation of the Plan as may be formulated, from time to time, by the Federal Government;
- v. co-ordinate the implementation of the Plan for the removal of hazardous and noxious substances as may be issued by the Federal Government;
- vi. ensure that all oil industry operators in Nigeria subscribe to and be bonafide members of Clean Nigeria Associates (CNA) or any other similar association by whatever name called; and
- vii. perform such other functions as may be required to achieve the aims and objectives of the Agency under this Act or any plan as may be formulated by the Federal Government pursuant to this Act.

The establishment of the agency was complemented with the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) with tasks that include developing a master plan for the development of the Niger Delta, providing infrastructure and creating an enabling environment for industrialization and employment [34]. The Commission was mandated to perform the following functions:

- i. Cause the Niger-Delta area to be surveyed in order to ascertain measures which are necessary to promote its physical and socio-economic development;
- ii. Prepare plans and schemes designed to promote the physical development of the Niger Delta area;
- iii. Identify factors inhibiting the development of the Niger-Delta and assist the member states in the formation and implementation of policies to ensure sound and efficient management of the resources of the Niger-Delta;

- iv. Assess and report on any project funded or carried out in the Niger-Delta area by oil and gas producing companies and any other company including non-governmental organizations and ensure that funds released for such projects are properly utilized;
- v. Tackle ecological and environmental problems that arise from the exploration of oil in the Niger-Delta area.
- vi. Liaise with the various oil mineral and gas prospecting and producing companies on all matters of pollution prevention and control.

These agencies were outside the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), the Federal Ministry of Environment, state ministries of environment as well as the National Maritime Authority which also work to protect the environment.

Part of the petroleum-related regulations targeted at achieving environmental protection in the Niger Delta was the Nigerian Petroleum Act of 1969 which required all operators to comply with good oil field practice for the reduction of the risk of oil spills. The Act specifically gave the Minister of Petroleum Resources the authority to revoke the license of any operator that does not comply with that standard. Equally, the Environmental Guidelines and Standards for the Petroleum Industry (EGASPIN) was a regulation that required that oil companies commenced clean-up within twenty-four hours of occurrence of a spill. Whether that regulation was complied with remains a subject of argument, bearing in mind that most oil key players in the region undermined international standards in their operations. In particular, it is evident that Ogoniland and other areas of the Niger Delta including the highly-populated wetlands sensitive to environmental damage have not been reportedly taken care of, despite the existence of oil spill laws and regulation. In fact, [35] agrees that Shell has failed to treat Ogoniland as a host community and has, thus, failed to comply with good oil field practice.

In view of the obvious flouting of the extant laws, the federal government is accused of complicity in an apparent conspiracy to undermine environmental health in the Niger Delta region and even sacrifice it on the altar of profit-making. Over time, the efficacy of monitoring mechanisms of the government has been called to question. The government is not only an actor and partner in the oil business but is entrusted with the responsibility of enforcing environmental laws and standards. But the fact remains that it has not effectively discharged its functions to the detriment of the people of Niger Delta and her environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since the commencement of oil production in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta, acts of terrorism which include blowing up of oil pipelines, oil installations and other platforms with explosives as well as seizure of oil barges, oil wells, flow stations, support vessels and other oil facilities with the aim of preventing the exploitation and distribution of crude oil or its refined products have thrived. These obviously deliberate acts are perpetrated with clear motive to draw attention to some multi-dimensional challenges in the region which require political solution, particularly the need to protect the environment frequently degraded as a result of the activities of the oil companies operating in the region. In fact, the dimension of oil terrorism in Nigeria takes even more alarming and dangerous dimension.

Obviously, the environment of the Niger Delta has been adversely impacted through pollution of various dimensions. The activities of the oil companies result in several ugly incidences such as oil spill which breach the right of the people to healthy living and use of ecosystem as source of livelihood. Sadly, this situation has continued unchecked.

In view of the obvious flouting of the extant environment-protection laws, the federal government is accused of complicity in the apparent conspiracy to undermine environmental health in the Niger Delta and sacrifice it on the altar of greed and profit-making. Over time, the efficacy of monitoring mechanisms of the government has been called to question. Pointers suggest that the regulators have become captured by vested interests doing business in the region, against collective interest. The resultant effect is continued degradation of the environment of Niger Delta with huge attendant consequences.

In the light of the foregoing, there is the need for authorities at federal level to rejig the regulatory agencies of government by way of ensuring that personnel with proven integrity are saddled with the responsibility of protecting the environment in the Niger Delta region. Besides, there is the need for strict regulation against compromise of collective interest in the region. There should be harsh penalty for defaulters so as to serve as deterrent to future acts of sabotage. Such acts of sabotage have, over time, made oil companies guilty of this misdemeanour to get away with their iniquity. In fact, the new law should stipulate and enforce far-reaching measures which must include shutting down operations of oil companies whose personnel compromise environmental standards in the region as well as compulsory confiscation of and forfeiture of their assets to government. On the other hand, a surveillance team needs to be put together by the federal government in each of the oil-producing states in the country with a responsibility to directly and independently provide quarterly report to government on matters pertaining to the environment. The team should comprise the locals, non-governmental organizations and renowned environmental activists. Certainly, the poor environment of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria needs to be salvaged with urgency. Allowing the status quo to remain should no longer be tolerated.

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