International Journal of Innovative Development and Policy Studies 7(2):38-49, April-June, 2019
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Crude Oil Exploration And Exploitation In Niger Delta: A Christian Concern

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ABSTRACT
The Niger Delta is best known as a region that sustains much oil exploration and exploitation by the agents of western economic powers. The Niger Delta basin is considered the mainstay of the Nigerian economy for its significantly high level of oil reserves. The region is also naturally endowed with viable deposits of hydrocarbon and gas reserves. Petroleum and derivatives dominate the Nigerian economy making up about 98 percent of exports, over 80 percent of government's annual revenue and 70 percent of budgetary expenditure. At the moment, Nigeria boasts of over 21 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and the world's sixth most important exporter of crude oil with the bulk of its exports going to the United States. The revenues and incomes generated by the petroleum industry have contributed very significantly to the economic well-being of Nigeria as a whole, petroleum exploration and production has however posed several environmental economic and social problems. There have been cases of oil spillages reported. Basically, the problem that gives vent to this study is on the negative effects of oil in Nigeria. The ascendancy of oil to the prime position in Nigeria and the neglect of all other non-oil sector gave Nigeria a mono-cultural economy or a one legged economy. Despite being the 8th largest producer of crude oil, what we have in the country to show the world is unprecedented level of unemployment. The Christian Churches should encourage governments at all levels in Nigeria must as a matter of urgency involve the ordinary people, communities, women, youths, community or ethnic leaders, traditional rulers, militants and oil companies in the following ways: (1) Enlighten and encourage the communities to take part in the process of discussing their problems and suggesting possible solutions; (2) Involve community based associations (CBAs), village councils, village heads, women, militants, activists, community leaders/elders, religious leaders, youth leaders and community youth leaders in interactive study workshops designed to suggest possible solutions and strategies for implementation.
Keywords: Exploitation, exploration, Niger-Delta, crude oil, christian

INTRODUCTION

Crude oil exploration and exploitation activities have been implicated as major causes of environmental degradation within the oil bearing communities of the Niger Delta. It was discovered that severe environmental degradation has been inflicted on the oil bearing communities of the Niger Delta as a result of oil spillages and other factors to the extent that economic activities in the area have been adversely affected leaving the people completely impoverished, with no meaningful alternative source of livelihood. The land, water and air have been polluted with crude oil over the years, thus depriving them of the opportunity to continue to engage in their usual basic economic activities, prominent among which are farming and fishing, from where they met their basic economic needs.

Stakeholders' participation critical decision making was visibly absent, thus creating doubts in the credibility of even the best and well-intended policy of the principal actors in the oil industry, thereby compounding the already pitiable situation. To address the current challenges of the Niger Delta and effectively guaranteed peace and economic growth of the oil bearing communities, it is, therefore, the aim of this study to articulate the concern of the Christians which in the first place, advocate a deliberate and practical policy whereby the people will be fully integrated in the scheme of things especially when certain policy decisions are being taken. Secondly, a system should be created whereby a reasonable chunk of the oil proceeds are judiciously applied towards a guaranteed economic development and empowerment of the people.

Crude Oil: An Overview

Crude oils are mixtures of hydrocarbon molecules (organic compounds of carbon and hydrogen atoms) containing from 1 to 60 carbon atoms. The properties of these hydrocarbons depend on the number and arrangement of the carbon and hydrogen atoms in their molecules. The basic hydrocarbon molecule is 1 carbon atom linked with 4 hydrogen atoms (methane) (American Petroleum Institute, 1980). All other variations of petroleum hydrocarbons evolve from this molecule. Hydrocarbons containing up to 4 carbon atoms are usually gases; those with 5 to 19 carbon atoms are usually liquids; and those with 20 or more are solids. In addition to hydrocarbons, crude oils and natural gases contain sulphur, nitrogen and oxygen compounds together with trace quantities of metals and other elements. Crude oil and natural gas are believed to have been formed over millions of years by the decay of vegetation and marine organisms, compressed under the weight of sedimentation (Salpukas, 1995). Because oil and gas are lighter than water, they rose up to fill the voids in these overlying formations. This upward movement stopped when the oil and gas reached dense, overlying, impervious strata or nonporous rock. The oil and gas filled the spaces in porous rock seams and natural underground reservoirs, such as saturated sands, with the lighter gas on top of the heavier oil (American Petroleum Institute, 1980). These spaces were originally horizontal, but shifting of the earth's crust created pockets, called faults, anticlines, salt domes and stratigraphic traps, where the oil and gas collected in reservoirs.

Crude oils are complex mixtures containing many different, individual hydrocarbon compounds; they differ in appearance and composition from one oil field to another, and sometimes are even different from wells relatively near one another. Crude oils range in consistency from watery to tar-like solids, and in colour from clear to black. An "average" crude oil contains about 84% carbon; 14% hydrogen; 1 to 3% sulphur; and less than 1% of nitrogen, oxygen, metals and salts (American Petroleum Institute, 1980). See table 1.

Crude oils are also defined in terms of API (specific) gravity. For example, heavier crude oils have low API gravities (and high specific gravities). A low-API gravity crude oil may have either a high or low flashpoint, depending on its lightest ends (more volatile constituents). Because of the importance of temperature and pressure in the refining process, crude oils are further classified as to viscosity, pour points and boiling ranges. Other physical and chemical characteristics, such as colour and carbon residue content, are also considered. Crude oils with high carbon, low hydrogen and low API gravity are usually rich in aromatics; while those with low carbon, high hydrogen and high API gravity are usually rich in paraffins (Energy Information Administration, 1996). Crude oils which contain appreciable quantities of hydrogen sulphide or other reactive sulphur compounds are called "sour." Those with less sulphur are called "sweet." Some exceptions to this rule are West Texas crudes (which are always considered "sour" regardless of their H_2S content) and Arabian high-sulphur crudes (which are not considered "sour" because their sulphur compounds are not highly reactive).

Table 1: Typical approximate characteristics and properties of various typical crude oils

Crude source and name *	Paraffins % vol	Aromatics % vol	Naphthenes % vol	Sulphur % wt	API gravity (approx)	Naphthene yield % vol	Octane number (typical)
Nigerian Light	37	9	54	0.2	36	28	60
Saudi Light	63	19	18	2	34	22	40
Saudi Heavy	60	15	25	2.1	28	23	35
Venezuela Heavy	35	12	53	2.3	30	2	60
Venezuela Light	52	14	34	1.5	24	18	50
USA Mid-continental Sweet	—	—	—	0.4	40	—	—
USA West Texas Sour	46	22	32	1.9	32	33	55
North Sea Brent	50	16	34	0.4	37	31	50

Source: Energy Information Administration (1996).

History of Oil Exploration in Nigeria

The history of oil exploration in Nigeria dates back to 1903 when Nigerian Bitumen Corporation conducted exploratory work in the country, at the onset of World War I the firm's operation were stopped (Ikejiaku, 2009). Due to the lack of technological and financial resources by small oil companies, large oil companies took over the exploration of commercial oil in the country. Thereafter, licenses were given to D'Arcy Exploration Company and Whitehall Petroleum but neither company found oil of commercial value and they returned their licenses in 1923. A new license covering 920,000 square kilometres (357,000 square miles) was given to Shell D'arcy Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, a consortium of Shell and British Petroleum (then known as Anglo-Iranian) (Essaghah, 2008). The company began exploratory work in 1937. The consortium was granted license to explore oil all over the territory of Nigeria but the acreage allotted to the company in the original license was reduced in 1951 and then between 1955 and 1957.

Drilling activities started in 1951 with the first test well drilled in Owerri area. Oil was discovered in non-commercial quantities at Akata, near Eket in 1953. Prior to the Akata find, the company had spent around 6 million pounds on exploratory activities in the country. Shell-BP in the pursuit of commercially available petroleum found oil in Oloibiri, Nigeria in 1956. Other important oil wells discovered during the period were Afam and Bomu in Ogoni territory (Essaghah, 2008). Production of crude oil began in 1957 and in 1960 a total of 847,000 tons of crude oil was exported. Towards the end of the 1950s, non-British firms were granted license to explore for oil: Mobil in 1955, Tenneco in 1960, Gulf Oil and later Chevron in 1961, Agip in 1962, and Elf in 1962 (Kareem, et al, 2012). Prior to the discovery of oil, Nigeria (like many other African countries) strongly relied on agricultural exports to other countries to supply their economy. Many Nigerians thought the developers were looking for palm oil. But after nearly 50 years searching for oil in the country, Shell-BP discovered the oil at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta. The first oil field began production in 1958.

Nearly all of the country's primary reserves are concentrated in and around the delta of the Niger River, but off-shore rigs are also prominent in the well-endowed coastal region. Nigeria is one of the few major oil-producing nations still capable of increasing its oil output. Unlike most of the other OPEC countries, Nigeria is not projected to exceed peak production until at least 2009. The reason for Nigeria's relative unproductivity is primarily OPEC regulations on production to regulate prices on the international market. More recently, production has been disrupted intermittently by the protests of the Niger Delta's inhabitants, who feel they are being exploited

The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

The Niger-Delta region is the area covered by the natural delta of the Niger River and the areas to the east and west. The broader Niger Delta Region consists of nine states (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers) and 185 local governments. The estimated regional population is nearly 30 million people. Difficult topography encourages people to gather in small communities (Omofonmwan and Odia, 2009). The Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria is made up of the following oil producing states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. Oil as a natural endowment in a particular community, area or region, with its exploration and exploitation is expected to be an abundant blessing to such community, area or region. Unfortunately and regrettably too, oil has turned out to be a curse to the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria since 1956 when it was first discovered in the region. The inhabitants of the region have been subjected to untold hardship through oil pollution, environmental degradation, destruction of aquatic lives, and other negative activities that are inimical to the existence and survival of the people of the region as a result of oil exploration and exploitation.

Oil was first discovered in commercial quantities in the Ijaw community of Oloibiri in 1956 in the Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Today, the inhabitants of this village/community are left with nothing but damaged farmlands and polluted rivers with no electricity, potable drinking water and other basic social amenities. Like the Oloibiri situation, the locals in many of the oil-bearing communities claim to still live in primitive conditions akin to that of the Stone Age, side by side with the high tech and modern facilities of the multinational community that they play host to. It is claimed that the advent of oil business in Nigeria has not really brought with it any tangible benefits; instead it ushered in high degradation of the Niger Delta environment, with concomitant poverty and much strife to the Niger Delta Region.

Today, the Niger Delta is best known as a region that sustains much oil exploration and exploitation by the agents of western economic powers. The Niger Delta basin is considered the mainstay of the Nigerian economy for its significantly high level of oil reserves. The region is also naturally endowed with viable deposits of hydrocarbon and gas reserves. Petroleum and derivatives dominate the Nigerian economy making up about 98 percent of exports, over 80 percent of government's annual revenue and 70 percent of budgetary expenditure. Crude oil resource gives the Nigeria government about US$ 20 million a day (Oluduro and Oluduro, 2012). At the moment, Nigeria boasts of over 21 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and the world's sixth most important exporter of crude oil with the bulk of its exports going to the United States.

To a considerable extent, the geographical location of the Niger Delta and its resources determine the traditional occupation of the people: fishing and farming. But politics is the major issue of the day in the Niger Delta. This is mainly due to the long neglect of the people's welfare by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the nonchalant attitude of the Transnational Oil Companies. The people of the Niger Delta believe that they have no substantial benefit to show for their sacrifices, despite being the goose that laid the golden eggs – the economic success that underpins the unity of the Nigerian state. However, security agents have always responded to demands put forward by the people of the Niger Delta in a brutal manner: many of the locals have been maimed, women raped and many have met untimely deaths. Local villages like Odi, Opia-

Ikenyan, Okerenkoko and Ogoniland have been destroyed by the Nigerian military through the use of excessive force in counter insurgency measures.

The Problem Stated

Throughout the early 1990s such popular unrest grew steadily, particularly in the Niger Delta region, where various ethnic groups began demanding compensation for years of ecological damage as well as control over their land's oil resources. This unrest manifested itself at the outset as peaceful activist organizations that united their members on the basis of ethnicity. The Niger Delta Region today is a place of frustrated expectations and deep-rooted mistrust. Unprecedented restiveness at times erupts in violence. Long years of neglect and conflict have fostered a siege mentality specifically among youths who feel they are condemned to a future without hope and see conflict as a strategy to escape deprivation. While turmoil in the delta has many sources and motivations, the preeminent underlying cause is the historical failure of governance at all levels. Declining economic performance leading to rising unemployment or underemployment; the lack of access to basic necessities of life like water, shelter, food and clothing; discriminatory policies that deny access to positions of authority and prevent people from participating in shaping the rules that govern their lives – these all indicate that governance over time has fallen short of the people's expectations.

Many reports have chronicled the region's monumental problems. The magnitude of the problems of the people of the Niger Delta is best illustrated in the report by the World Bank in 1995. In 1995 the two volume study entitled; "Defining an Environmental Development Strategy for the Niger Delta" was conducted by the Industry and Energy Operations Division of West Central Africa Department of the World Bank. The region is described in the following words:

> The Niger Delta has been blessed with an abundance of physical and human resources, including the majority of Nigerian's oil and gas deposits, good agriculture land, extensive forests, excellent fisheries, as well as a well-developed industrial base, a strong banking system, a large labour force, and a vibrant private sector. However, the region's tremendous potentials for economic growth and sustainable development remains unfulfilled and its future is threatened by deteriorating economic conditions that are not being address by present policies and actions (World Bank, 1995).

The report continued:

> Education levels are below the national average and are particularly low for women. While 76 percent of Nigerian children attend primary schools this level drops to 30 percent in some parts of the Niger Delta. The poverty level in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In the urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index is the highest in Nigeria (World Bank, 1995).

One of the major environmental problems in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria since the inception of oil exploration, exploitation, processing and transportation by the multinational oil companies has been that of oil spillage. Oil spills in the Niger Delta Region has caused a diverse depletion of environmental assets, values and worth's and has also caused hardship and poverty among the host communities. According to the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) of the Federal Ministry of Petroleum in Nigeria, the Niger Delta is one of the world's largest Wetlands' and the largest in Africa. It encompasses four main flourish and rich ecological zones; they are coastal barrier Islands, mangroves, fresh water swamp forest and lowland rainforests. This area in particular has been greatly impacted by oil spillage. The NNPC in its annual report, places the quantity of oil jettisoned into the Niger Delta environment yearly at two thousand, three hundred (2,300) cubic meters with an average of three hundred (300) individual spills annually. In another report, it states that the total amount of oil in barrels spilled between 1960 and 1997 is upwards of one hundred million barrels (Green Peach Oil Briefing, 1993).

Oil Spillage has a major impact on the ecosystem into which it is released. It destroys the mangrove forests which are especially susceptible to oil; this is mainly because it stores up oil in the soil and re-releases it annually with inundation. It is estimated that about five to ten percent

(5-10%) of the mangrove in the Niger Delta Region has been opportunities for leaks. In onshore areas, most pipelines and flow lines are laid above the ground and are more than twenty-four years old (source). Even one of the oil company in the region, Shell, admits that most of the facilities has fifteen years estimated life span. Consequently, the Niger Delta has faced one calamity to another due to poor management continuous criticisms over multinational oil companies' management in the Niger Delta Region.

The revenues and incomes generated by the petroleum industry have contributed very significantly to the economic well-being of Nigeria as a whole, petroleum exploration and production has however posed several environmental economic and social problems. There have been cases of oil spillages reported. For example the Sopmta Babara California oil spillage experience in 1974 and another incident a huge tanker transporting crude oil from Persian Gulf to a European refinery (Worgu, 2000). The big ship ran aground on Spanish port of la Corona and exploded releasing thousands of tons of toxic oil into the coaster waters. It has been found out that the problems of oil spillage are more pronounced on the aquatic habitat than on the terrestrial habitat. Basically, the problem that gives vent to this study is on the negative effects of oil in Nigeria. The ascendancy of oil to the prime position in Nigeria and the neglect of all other non-oil sector gave Nigeria a mono-cultural economy or a one legged economy. Despite being the 8th largest producer of crude oil, what we have in the country to show the world is unprecedented level of unemployment. Nigeria today is one of the poorest countries of the world as measured by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI).

Evidently, the advent of oil and gas and the attendant revenue from it has not been deployed for the benefits of the states where these resources are gotten. Infrastructural developments in the oil producing states are nothing to write home about. Roads in the south-south part of the country are in the worst state. Unemployment of the youths is on the increase on daily basis with no concrete efforts on the part of the Federal or State Government to put an end to the menace. The traditional occupation of the people of the south-south has been bastardized; fishing is no longer possible and environmental degradation is in its worst form.

Furthermore the oil companies operating in the South-south have not helped the situation. They cajoled their host communities into signing a bogus memorandum of understanding (MOU), promising them paradise on earth only to renege on their promise; and instead of giving in return something that will benefit their host communities, the officials of these oil companies often instead prefer to give huge sums of money to the traditional chiefs and some selected youth leaders. The result of their double standard is the monster called militant youths who have made the region one of the most volatile among OPEC countries.

Another monster created by the unwanted mismanagement of this resource is crude oil theft. This came into force barely five years ago. Youths in Niger Delta region who are already used to free money devised a way of affecting a hole in the crude pipelines thereby siphoning crude oil and selling them at a giveaway price to international rogues. Money made from this illegal business is part of what is being used to militarize the region. Today, Nigeria military forces cannot match the type of the sophisticated arms in the towns and villages across Niger Delta. The youths who are already used to free money from the crude oil theft usually formed themselves into ethnic militia to champion the cause of their community and vent their anger on the oil companies and Nigerian nation for not meeting their aspiration. They first vent their anger on oil installations, forcing some of these companies to shut down, and when they sensed that, that was not achieving the desired result, they took to the latest onslaught (hostage taking), which they see as an avenue for raking in millions of naira (through ransom). In fact, poor funding of the NDDC by the Federal Government to execute its blue print has been fingered as the greatest problem militating the rapid development of the region.

The Nigerian coastal areas within the offshore regions are zones of functional activities. Since oil exploration is not properly regulated, hazardous developments are bound to occur and this extends through normal wave force to other regions. For instance, the major effects of major

hazards such as NNPC spill in 1992, Oshaka oil spill in 1993, and Ibeno spill in 1998 has resulted to serious environment problems in the Niger Delta. The magnitude of crude oil pollution and damage of environmental value occasioned by multi-national oil companies operations in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is incredible. It is noteworthy that, the devastating consequences of the spill of this crude in Eleme Local Government Area, Ogoni with its eventual hazards on both aerial and terrestrial environs tantamount to an irreversible chain effect on both the bio-diversity and human safety. The oil spill related problems in Eleme include the defoliation and death of mangrove vegetation, contamination of rivers, stream and groundwater supply, destroying aquatic and terrestrial lives leading to the extinction of plants and animals species, human sickness, corrosion of roof, as well as water ways which were used as trading routes among communities, rural impoverishment due to loss of source of livelihood, and contaminating lands for farming. This problem has also deprived the rural host communities the needed socio-economic development and their rural activities including fishing, farming and forest products for their livelihood.

In addition to the above, the problem of youth bitterness, restiveness, agitations and violence in the affected communities which has forced migration of inhabitants is also a problem that needs resolutions. Despite the environmental effects on crude oil spill, its effects on human health on the impacted victims as a result of consumption of contaminated crops and aquatic organisms is also an endemic condition in this area. The negative impact of oil production have led to the general disturbances of social, political, cultural and economic live of the people in oil producing communities and the nation at large. This impact seems to be well articulated by the people and of major concern to both government and oil companies. On 30 January 2013, a Dutch court ruled that Shell can be held accountable for the pollution in the Niger Delta. Oil and gas extraction are meant for economic development and economic empowerment of the entire people of the country, but the reverse is the case as the ordinary masses, especially the people of the oil-bearing communities, are totally impoverished and their communities grossly underdeveloped.

Impact of Crude Oil Exploitation in the Niger Delta

Nigerian crude oil reserve is over 25 billion barrels, while the crude oil production per day is estimated at 2.2 million barrels (Nwilo and Badejo, 2001).Nigeria, with the largest natural gas reserve in Africa and the second largest oil reserve, also in Africa, is the largest producer of oil in the continent. The production rate has been on the increase over the years starting with a production capacity of 5100 barrels per day. In 2008, Nigeria's crude oil production averaged 1.94 mb/d, and slightly over 2.2mb/d in 2009 (Country Analysis Brief, 2009). The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) News and Update as at May 2016 revealed that Nigerian crude oil production has increased from 2.4 million barrels per day (mbpd) to an all-time high of 2.7mbpd. Thus, the persistent demand for attention and amenities such as Primary Health Centre (PHC), educational facilities etc, by the representatives of host communities is to ensure relevance in terms of socio-economic well-being after the oil becomes empty (Omofonmwan and Odia, 2009). According to Kareem, Kari, Alam, Chukwu, David and Oke (2012), all stages of oil exploitation negatively affect the environment, and the greatest single intractable problem caused by crude oil exploration in the Niger Delta is oil spillage. In trying to extract oil, the host communities have suffered grievously in terms of direct loss of their farming lands and fishing waters due to spill.

Environmental damage due to spill has both short-term and long-term effects. The effects could last for decades even after clean-up exercise. When oil spills, it coats every substance it comes in contact with, plants absorb it and get damaged and the entire land (forests and wetlands) and water bodies become most unsuitable for sustenance of life. The entire ecosystem in contact with oil becomes contaminated. In water, fish and other smaller organisms which are essential links in the global food chain are destroyed, while on land, wildlife habitat becomes too hostile for continued existence of its inhabitants. In his study on Special Issues on Africa-based Oil Exporting Companies, Snapps (2011) opined that the wide-scale contamination of farmlands,

creeks, swamps and rivers in the Niger Delta is the result of crude oil exploration, refining and other allied business activities in the region. Oil-related environmental degradation is a direct consequence of oil exploitation. Identification of needs by the people and participation of the people in the process of servicing their needs, are vital synergies towards actualizing the people's needs and desires (that are accepted as satisfactory), (Omofonmwan and Odia, 2009). The very long period of intensive oil activities in this area, dating back to 1956, has been implicated in the large scale pollution, environmental degradation, soil impoverishment, destruction of aquatic life, diminishing agricultural productivity, displacement and mass exodus of youths to cities, restiveness initiated by youths left behind, numerous vices which include kidnapping, vandalism and other social ills. Evidently, the people's core interests and aspirations have not been properly articulated and factored into the daily operations of the MNOCs involved in the continuous oil extraction in the region. In the course of oil extraction too, spills occur on different scales.

Oil spill is a global environmental issue which occurs regularly for as long as oil production goes on. Spill is a major threat to the environment of the host communities as the oil pollutes the waters, land and air and create very hostile environment for both the flora and fauna. It also cripples economic activities on a large scale. The volume of oil that has been spilled into the environment of the oil-bearing Niger Delta communities is quite enormous. According to (Nwilo and Badejo, 2010), between 1976 and 1996 alone, a total of 4647 incidents resulted in the spill of approximately 2,369,470 barrels of oil into the environment. Also, between 1997 and 2001, Nigeria recorded a total number of 2,097 oil spill incidents. The largest spill was the offshore well damage in January 1980, when at least 200,000 barrels of oil (8.4 million U.S. gallons), according to oil industry sources, spilled into the Atlantic Ocean from Texaco facility and destroyed 340 hectares of mangroves (Oil Spill Intelligence Report, 1998).

Oil exploration and exploitation are meant to bring development both on the issues of per capita income, Gross National Product (GNP) and also in the socio economic context. The socio economic context of development implies modernization, "a process whereby a society is reoriented in its structure, institutions values and patterns of behaviour. The Niger Delta communities have remained grossly socio-economically underdeveloped and pauperized amidst the immense oil wealth owing to systematic disequilibrium in the production exchange relationship between the state, the trans-national companies and the people (Essaghah, 2008). Environmental degradation of the oil-rich Niger Delta region has been wanton and continuous with dire health, social and economic consequences for its people, for over three decades. Corroborating the above submission is the position of Worgu (2000), in his study titled Hydrocarbon Exploitation, Environmental Degradation and Poverty in the Niger Delta, that crude oil exploitation has had adverse environmental effects on soils, forest and water bodies in the host communities.

Volumes have been written over the years on the impact of oil activities on the environment, thus reinforcing its global significance. Chief among these sources of environmental degradation is oil spill. Snapps (2011) in his work, revealed that environmental degradation caused by the oil spill and other oil and gas activities has worsened the economic levels of the people by destroying the once abundant fishing grounds and decreasing availability of quality agricultural land, thereby furthering impoverishment of those affected. There is therefore a linkage between environmental degradation and economic growth of the areas affected. In assessing the impact of oil activities on the environment and subsequently the implications on the economic development of the oil bearing communities, environmentalists agree on the adverse socio economic consequences of oil spill on the host communities citing the soil fertility as the most adversely affected by the crude oil thus creating a monumental reduction in agricultural productivity. Environmental degradation arising from oil spills result in internal displacement of communities, diminished productivity of farming and fishing, mass relocation, occupation and income losses, poverty, induced voluntary and involuntary migration, loss in ancestral homes and familiar surroundings, loss in religious and cultural arte facts, youth restiveness and inter community clashes. This view translates into

colossal loss of income and source of livelihood, forcing the farmers to abandon their land to seek succor through other means which in most cases are not available.

Pollution of the soil and water is instantly reflected on low agricultural productivity as well as reduction in quantity of edible aquatic animals and this translates into series of painful social and economic consequences. The soil is starved of relevant nutrients such as nitrogen, oxygen, etc. which the plants need for healthy development and growth while sea animals suffocate under the crude oil floating on the waters. In the process, economic trees and fishes are depleted and lost to the spills. This very deplorable situation has completely disorganized the traditional social and economic life of the people, thus making life most unbearable for them.

Efforts so far made by the Federal Government of Nigeria to Ameliorate the Problems

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the federal government of Nigeria had made the following impressionistic efforts at ameliorating the problems of the Niger-Delta Region:

i. The first attempt at addressing the backwardness, poverty and neglect in the Niger-Delta Region from 1956 when oil exploration and exploitation started found expression in the establishment of the Niger-Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1959 by the Colonial Administration. Unfortunately, NDDB's assignment suffered major setback with the onset of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 as the board became functional.

ii. In 1993, the federal government of Nigeria established the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in line with the recommendations of The Belgore Commission. OMPADEC suffered from lack of planning and collapsed leaving numerous unfinished projects. Eventually, OMPADEC failed to solve the problems in the Niger Delta Region, thereby necessitating the need for the federal government to return to the drawing table in order to improve the situation.

iii. In 2000, the federal government established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) amidst opposition from activists in the region that the commission would not be accountable to the communities, and would suffer from mismanagement and corruption. Some Niger-Delta residents are already criticizing the NDDC, while the commission's staff had been complaining of inadequate funding. In 2004, NDDC prepared a Draft Master-Plan for the region, which was estimated to cost US$2.9 billion over a fifteen year period. Unfortunately, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) rejected NDDC and criticized the commission on the grounds that it is: "a channel for further looting of the meager sums of money allocated to the development of the Niger-Delta Region". As if (MEND) was prophesizing, Nigerians were recently astonished to hear that the chairman of the board gave the sum of 800 million Naira (Nigerian currency), an equivalent of US$5.1 million to a witch-doctor to assist him consolidate his position as the chairman of the board, and one wonders how a paid employee was able to raise such a huge sum of money. From all available information, the effect of NDDC is yet to be felt by the people of the Niger-Delta Region.

iv. In 2009, the federal government established the Ministry of Niger Delta to handle the infrastructural development of the region. So far and unfortunately too, adequate financial allocation has not been made to the ministry and the implications of this is that the ministry may fail woefully like its predecessors if adequate fund is not given to it. In a nutshell, one can categorically infer without fear of contradiction that these agencies were not really established to bring succour or development to the Niger-Delta Region, but mere impressionistic or cosmetic efforts, because it did not take the same federal government of Nigeria long to develop and transform the federal capital, Abuja, situated in the north, to a world class standard.

Christian Concern

Christian views on environmentalism vary among different Christians and Christian denominations. Major Christian denominations endorse the Biblical calling of stewardship of God's Creation and our responsibility for its care. Some of this church policy is relatively recent and may not be followed by some parishioners. According to some social science research, conservative Christians and members of the Christian rights are typically less concerned about issues of environmentalism than the general public (Peterson and Liu, 2008). Many Christians, however, are environmental activists and promote awareness and action at the church, community, and national levels. For instance, Green Christianity is a broad field that encompasses Christian theological reflection on nature, Christian liturgical and spiritual practices centered on environmental issues, as well as Christian-based activism in the environmental movement (James and Robert, 2003). Within the activism arena, green Christianity refers to a diverse group of Christian who emphasize the biblical or theological basis for protecting and celebrating the environment. The term indicates not a particular denomination, but a shared territory of concern.

As a result of the doctrine of stewardship, Christian environmentalists oppose policies and practices that threaten the health or survival of the planet. Of particular concern to such Christians are the current widespread reliance on non-renewable resources, habitat destructions, pollution, and all other factors that contribute to climate change or otherwise threaten the health of the ecosystem. Many Christian environmentalists have broken with conservative political leaders as a result of these positions.

As governments and citizens of all nations struggle to adapt to climate change and mitigate disaster as best we can, Christianity and other faiths can help us keep this requirement of total inclusivity at the forefront of our minds. We are all connected in intangible but ignorable ways. As Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical Laudato Si:

> Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay, and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality…to seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system (Pope, 2013).

The transformations that must be enacted in our society go deeper than driving Priuses and changing light bulbs – they go beyond technical into the realm of moral and spiritual. The environmental movement in the U.S. has always had a spiritual dimension, emerging as it did from the Romantic Period. It is being challenged by theologies of liberation and evangelists. It is being challenged by the Pope himself. Christian organizations and activists are helping to make environmentalism holistic, a call to reach beyond a few superficial, personal changes in our lives to a deeper, ethical change, a transformation that involves justice as an integral part. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other Christian bodies in Nigeria can do the same. Churches have the resources to pursue systemic change and the language to frame scientific facts ethically. They can also act as a forum for broader inclusivity and diversity in environmental debates. However, Christian communities in the Niger Delta region possess the potential for transformative, provocative hope in the pursuit of eco-justice.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other Christian bodies in Nigeria can pursue the goal of the Early Church for the people of the Niger Delta. For the scripture says:

> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.32… There were no needy persons among them for from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales,34 And put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.35 (Acts 4:32,34,35 NIV).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Niger Delta region has experienced both intensive as well as aggressive oil activities since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri in 1956. The Nigerian nation, having found this product a major foreign exchange earner, without proper planning and management strategies, swung into the tapping of this resource, so recklessly that it has turned-out to be, no longer an asset but a liability to the country, as it has left the environment completely devastated and its people grievously impoverished. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 1981) annual report, oil accounted for more than 90% of Nigerian exports by value and about 80% of government revenue. The situation is still the same today it is still the major foreign exchange earner. Oil has indeed played a very significant role in the overall economic growth of the country.

However, the adverse implications of petroleum exploration, exploitation and production are very severe as these have affected the micro economic indices of the host communities. If the oil industry is considered in view of its enormous contribution to foreign exchange earnings, it has achieved a remarkable success. On the other scale, when considered in respect of its negative impact on the socio-economic life and the environment of the immediate oil-bearing local communities and its inhabitants, it has left a balance sheet of ecological and socio-physical disaster. The people of the Niger Delta claim that the pollution of their land, water and air environments is as a result of the poor and inefficient management and production systems of the operators in the oil and gas industries by way of total neglect and non-involvement of the stakeholders in the entire process.

The Christian Churches should encourage governments at all levels in Nigeria must as a matter of urgency involve the ordinary people, communities, women, youths, community or ethnic leaders, traditional rulers, militants and oil companies in the following ways: (1) Enlighten and encourage the communities to take part in the process of discussing their problems and suggesting possible solutions; (2) Involve community based associations (CBAs), village councils, village heads, women, militants, activists, community leaders/elders, religious leaders, youth leaders and community youth leaders in interactive study workshops designed to suggest possible solutions and strategies for implementation; (3) On the basis of the suggestions during the interactive study workshops, design training programmes and organize training sessions for them; (4) Organize dialogue sessions, interactive workshops for traditional rulers, traditional rulers‟ council, women, youths and militant groups in each of the states and local government authority areas on how to solve the problems of each community; (5) Encourage the formation of neighbourhood, creeks and village watch associations to provide surveillance and security for security personnel and company installations; (6) Give voice to the socially excluded through the involvement of CBAs, ordinary people's representatives in a participatory process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of community projects; (7) Transnational oil companies should reserve a percentage of job openings for qualified and employable youths in their host communities;

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