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Examining The Impact Of Oil And Gas Activities On The Right To Health With Special Reference To The Niger Delta

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ABSTRACT

The detrimental impact of oil and gas operations on human rights is a widely acknowledged reality. Indeed, international consensus holds that the realization of human rights is inextricably linked to a pollution-free environment. The fact that the hub to which the global goals inextricably connect and around which they revolve and derive essence, is human health, well-being, and the right to life. Goal three of the seventeen sustainable development goals, which is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, must transcend mere policy document and translate to improvement of health and well-being for the people in the Niger Delta region. Environmental degradation jeopardizes fundamental human rights, including life, health, food, and clean water, which rely on a healthy environment. While the global environmental crisis is alarming, the Niger Delta's situation is particularly dire due to devastating ecological impact of oil and gas companies' operations. The relentless environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region continually undermines the basic rights guaranteed by the Nigerian Constitution. Consequently, this research probes the intricate relationships between oil and gas activities and consequential detrimental impact on the health rights of the region's inhabitants. This study narrows its focus to investigate the detrimental effects of gas flaring and oil spillage on the right to health in the Niger Delta, a region already beset by numerous environmental issues. This study's conclusions underscore the urgent need for regulation of oil companies' activities to prevent the escalation of human rights abuses in the Niger Delta. To address this issue, the author proposes the adoption of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a vital tool for environmental conservation, human rights protection, and the advancement of sustainable development.

Keywords: , oil spillage, gas flaring, human rights protection

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been significant growth in global efforts to promote human rights, health, and environmental protection. To tackle the complex issues in these areas, the international community has developed a robust network of international laws, specialized institutions, and agencies operating at global and regional levels.² Although human rights, health, and environmental protection have evolved independently, their intrinsic connections became evident at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.³ Health emerged as a critical nexus, bridging environmental protection and human

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² Uchegbu A., "Legal Framework for Oil Spill and Clean-Up Liability and Compensation in Nigeria", in the Petroleum Industry and the Nigerian Environment (Proceedings of the 1983 International Seminar, NNPC, Lagos, 1984), p. 33.

³ Declaration of the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm (1972), commonly referred to as the Stockholm Declaration, 1972 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1>.

rights. The conference concluded with a pivotal declaration, where participants affirmed and proclaimed that:

*"Man is both creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth.....Both aspects of man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights- even the right to life itself."*⁴

Principle 1 of the Stockholm Declaration establishes a fundamental framework, recognizing the intrinsic link between human rights, health, and environmental protection, and asserting that individuals have an inalienable right to a life of dignity, well-being, freedom, equal opportunity, and decent living standards, all of which are contingent upon a healthy environment.⁵

Thus, the safeguarding of human rights is inherently tied to the preservation of a clean and healthy environment. The most basic human rights, including the right to life and health, are directly threatened by environmental hazards such as soil and water pollution, deforestation, and exposure to toxic substances.⁶

Furthermore, environmental conditions play a crucial role in determining the extent to which individuals can enjoy their fundamental rights, including access to nutritious food, safe housing, cultural heritage, and traditional ways of life. There is a pressing need to acknowledge that environmental degradation and pollution not only violate ecological principles but also constitute a breach of human rights.⁷ While the global environmental crisis is a pressing concern, the Niger Delta region stands out as a stark example of the catastrophic consequences of the oil and gas industries' reckless and unsustainable operations. The Niger Delta is presently beset by a multitude of environmental problems, with this research undertaking a targeted examination of the detrimental effects of gas flaring and oil spillage on the right to health. A thorough analysis exposes a disturbing pattern of inaction, wherein both governmental authorities and oil corporations have, since the onset of oil exploration, persistently disregarded or willfully ignored the devastating health consequences of their operations on the regional populace. This finding underscores the imperative that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) be maintained as a crucial instrument for mitigating the detrimental effects of proposed projects on both the environment and local communities.

2. OIL AND GAS ACTIVITIES IN THE NIGER DELTA

Oil extraction and mining operations in the Niger Delta are not inherently environmental conflicts, but rather socioeconomic disputes centered on resource allocation and utilization. However, the harmful consequences of these activities, including environmental degradation, can ultimately give rise to environmental conflicts, serving as a catalyst for tensions and disputes. A strong causal link exists between environmental degradation and environmental conflict, as the deterioration of natural resources consistently gives rise to conflicts. Environmental degradation and conflict are deeply intertwined, forming a reciprocal relationship where each perpetuates the other. In reality, they are mutually reinforcing, with degradation often serving as both the precursor to and consequence of conflict. The degradation of the environment will inevitably spark conflict, as both are direct consequences of the reckless and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. The resulting conflict is, in essence, a fight for human survival rather than merely an environmental concern. The Niger Delta community's deep dependence on the environment means that any environmental degradation will have a profound impact

⁴ Ibid, Proclamation 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland. Nairobi, Kenya: UNEP; 2011. pp. 8–17.

⁷ Adeola O. Adeyemo, "Assessing Environmental Protection and Management System in West Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria" (MSc Thesis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, United States, 2008) 18-52.

on their fundamental rights and very existence. The Niger Delta Region's conflicts are sparked by the destructive consequences of unsustainable resource extraction, where exploitative companies and facilities neglect to implement mitigation strategies or restoration plans, leaving the environment irreparably damaged. A report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights that the Niger Delta Region's resource utilization conflicts are rooted in the severe environmental degradation, which has compromised the fundamental rights of local residents. Prolonged government inaction has exacerbated this issue, failing to address the environmental harm caused by oil industry operations. This section delves into two primary oil and gas activities that significantly affect the health rights of Niger Delta inhabitants.

A. GAS FLARING

The practice of gas flaring has long been a source of controversy in Nigeria, dating back to the beginning of the country's oil extraction operations. The gas emitted during this process, known as associated gas,⁸ is a natural byproduct of oil production. Notably, this gas can be harnessed and separated from crude oil, offering significant potential for commercial utilization. Associated gas can be utilized in three main ways once separated from oil. One option is to harness it as liquefied natural gas,⁹ providing a valuable energy resource. For example, the power generation potential of the 679.5 million standard cubic feet (Mscf) of gas reportedly flared in Rivers State is 67.9 thousand GWh.¹⁰ The 2.3 billion Mscf of gas flared in eight States¹¹ in the Niger Delta between the month of March 2012 and January 2025, which amounts to 122.3 million tonnes CO₂ emissions, is valued at 8.1 billion USD, and the Power generation potential is 230.3 thousand GWh.¹²

Another alternative is to re-inject the gas into the ground, thereby minimizing its environmental footprint. However, a prevalent practice in developing nations, including Nigeria, is to flare the gas,¹³ with the country burning off over 50% of its associated gas production.¹⁴ According to the World Bank's Global Gas Flaring Reduction Partnership (GGFR), a significant amount of Nigeria's gross natural gas production is either re-injected or flared. Nigeria flared about 261 billion cubic feet (Bcf) of natural gas in 2018, making Nigeria the seventh-largest natural gas flaring country in terms of annual natural gas flaring volume.¹⁵ This practice is widely condemned due to its severe environmental consequences and wasteful nature.¹⁶ The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is plagued by the widespread

⁸ Torulagha P. S "Onshore/Offshore Dichotomy: Why the Locus of Power Lies in the North" <http://www.unitedijaw.com/torulagha0000109.htm> [accessed on 28th October, 2024].

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nigeria Gas Flare Tracker <https://nosdra.gasflaretracker.ng/about.htm> [accessed 15th February 2025].

¹¹ Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Imo and Rivers States, respectively.

¹² <https://nosdra.gasflaretracker.ng/about.html>.

¹³ Torulagha P. S "Onshore/Offshore Dichotomy: Why the Locus of Power Lies in the North" <http://www.unitedijaw.com/torulagha0000109.htm> [accessed on 28th October, 2024].

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 2019 Worldwide Reserves Survey (Table), *Oil & Gas Journal*, January 2020 cited in Bunmi Akaakar, "Governance For Sustainable Development- The Nigerian Petroleum Industry: A Review", in Okene OVC and Nwauzi Linus (eds.) "Book of Readings in Law Legal Essays in Commemoration of the Existence of Faculty of Law, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria", Zubic Infinity Concept, Nigeria, 2021, 150. It is pertinent to indicate that several initiatives have been put in place to reduce the volume of gas that is flared given the national commitment as a party to the Paris Agreement under the global climate change initiative. The Nigerian Gas flare commercialization programme is an example.

¹⁶ Torulagha P. S "The Niger Delta: Strategic Factors and Options" available at <http://www.unitedijaw.com/torulagha0000103.htm> [accessed on 28th October, 2011]; Torulagha P. S "The Causes of Conflicts and Instability in Niger" available at <http://www.unitedijaw.com/torulagha0000104.htm> [accessed on 28th October, 2024]; Torulagha P. S "Onshore/Offshore Dichotomy: Why the Locus of Power Lies in the North" available at <http://www.unitedijaw.com/torulagha0000109.htm> [accessed on 28th October, 2024]; Torulagha P. S "Niger's Dilemma: Is Petroleum a National Resources or Not" available at <http://www.unitedijaw.com/torulagha0000110.htm> [accessed on 28th October, 2024]; Torulagha P. S "Political Consolidation and Empowerment: What Ijaws Should Do" available at <http://www.unitedijaw.com/torulagha0000113.htm> [accessed on 28th October, 2023].

practice of flaring associated gas, as a byproduct of crude oil extraction. This environmental degradation is a daily reality, serving as a stark reminder of the oil industry's impact.¹⁷ Alarming, Nigeria tops the global list in terms of gas flaring, with a staggering number of over 100 flaring sites currently operating within the Niger Delta.¹⁸ Gas flaring is a substantial contributor to global warming,¹⁹ emitting a range of toxic pollutants, including sulfur oxide, nitrogen oxides, benzopyrene, xylene, and hydrogen sulfide.²⁰ Furthermore, the massive emissions of methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere have severe and far-reaching impacts on human populations, the environment, and the delicate balance of the ecosystem.²¹

The Niger Delta communities rely heavily on farming and fishing as their primary source of income. However, the devastating impact of gas flaring in the region extends beyond environmental degradation, also threatening the livelihoods of its inhabitants. Moreover, Nigeria's gas flaring activities contribute significantly to climate change, accounting for a staggering 25% of Africa's greenhouse gas emissions.²² The underlying reason for this destructive practice is the perceived high cost of separating commercially viable associated gas from oil,²³ a decision that prioritizes short-term economic gains over long-term sustainability and community well-being. Notwithstanding their dependence on natural gas for operational purposes, industries in Nigeria surprisingly prefer to source this gas from deposits containing high volumes of non-associated gas, which is free from oil mixtures,²⁴ rather than utilizing the associated gas that is readily available in oil fields.

Gas flaring in Nigeria has its roots in the 1950s, when Shell-BP launched oil extraction operations. Surprisingly, the Nigerian Government allowed this practice to continue unchecked, despite the existence of the Associated Gas Re-Injection Act, which explicitly prohibits flaring of associated gas "after 1 January, 1984" without the permission of the Minister.²⁵ Clearly, gas flaring is not prohibited

¹⁷ Rufus O. Idris "Impacts of Oil Spillage and Gas Flaring on the Population and Distribution of Birds in Niger Delta of Nigeria: A Brief Interim Report Submitted to ABC Conservation Awards and Fund, United Kingdom" Retrieved from <http://www.google.com.my/search?q=%20Rufus%20O.%20Idris%20E2%80%9CImpacts%20of%20Oil%20Spillage%20and%20Gas%20Flaring%20on%20the%20Population%20and%20Distribution%20of%20Birds%20in%20Niger%20Delta%20of%20Nigeria&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&source=hp&channel=np> [accessed on 20th January, 2023].

¹⁸ Eferiekosa Ukala "Gas Flaring in Nigeria's Niger Delta: Failed promises and Reviving Community Voices" (2011) 97(2) *WASH. & LEE J. ENERGY, CLIMATE & ENV'T*, 98-126.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Bruno Gervet, "Gas Flaring Emission Contributes To Global Warming" (2007) available at http://www.itu.se/polopoly_fs/1.5035!gas%20flaring%20report%20-%20final.pdf [accessed on 25th October, 2024]; The Climate Justice Programme & Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, "Gas Flaring In Nigeria: A Human Rights, Environmental, And Economic Monstrosity" (2005), available at <http://www.climatelaw.org/media/cases/case-documents/nigeria/gas-flaring-in-nigeria.pdf> [accessed on 25th October, 2023]; Nnimmo Bassey, "Gas Flaring: Assaulting Communities, Jeopardizing The World" (2008) available at <http://www.eraction.org/publications/presentations/gas-flaring-ncc-abuja.pdf> [accessed 23rd October, 2024] (describing the harmful effects of gas flaring on the health of the people in the Niger Delta, on the economy of the region, and on the world because of gas flaring's relation to climate change); See Ofeibe Quist-Arcton, "Gas Flaring Disrupts Life in Oil-Producing Niger Delta" (National Public Radio July 24, 2007), available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12175714> [accessed on 23rd October, 2023].

²¹ See Gulzhan Nurakhmet, "Gas Flaring and Venting: What can Kazakhstan learn from the Norwegian Experience?" (2006) available at http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cepmlp/car/html/CAR10_ARTICLE14.PDF [accessed on 23rd October, 2023] (discussing environmentally safe alternatives to gas flaring); Paula Palmer, "Emergency Action: Stop Gas Flaring in Nigeria" (2009) available at <http://www.foei.org/en/media/archive/2009/nigeria-to-stop-companies-flaring-gas> [accessed on 23rd October, 2011]; Paula Palmer, "Mangrove Action Project, Niger Delta's Mangrove Communities Threatened by Continued Gas Flaring" (2009) Available at <http://mangroveactionproject.org/news/action-alerts/niger-deltas-mangrove-communities-threatened-by-continued-gas-flaring> [accessed on 23rd October, 2024] (noting that despite the fact that Nigeria's Niger Delta is endowed with crude oil, local residents have limited access to crude-oil by-products).

²² Hari M. Osofsky, "Climate Change Litigation as Pluralistic Legal Dialogue?" (2007) 26 *STAN. ENVTL. L.J.* 181-182.

²³ Paula Palmer, "Mangrove Action Project, Niger Delta's Mangrove Communities Threatened by Continued Gas Flaring" (2009) Available at <http://mangroveactionproject.org/news/action-alert/niger-delta-mangrove-communities-threatened-by-continued-gas-flaring> [accessed on 23rd October, 2023].

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See section 3 of the Associated Gas Re-Injection Act, CAP. A 25 Laws of Federation of Nigeria, 2004.

outright in Nigeria.²⁶ Flaring without the requisite permit simply attracts a penalty.²⁷ An earlier appraisal of the government approach to gas flaring put the matter succinctly thus:

*“The ‘stick and carrot’ option of penalizing flaring so as to encourage companies to embark on gas utilization projects is a paradigm of the Nigerian gas industry”*²⁸

The consequences of this inaction are dire, as gas flares pose significant threats to the health, well-being, and livelihoods of communities living in close proximity to these hazardous emissions.

The hazardous emissions from gas flares contain a multitude of toxic chemicals, posing a significant threat to human health.²⁹ Exposure to pollutants like benzopyrene and dioxin has been linked to a range of respiratory issues, which are disproportionately prevalent among children in the Delta, yet remain largely unexamined.³⁰ Research has conclusively shown that these substances can aggravate asthma, leading to respiratory distress, pain, and a cascade of other adverse health effects.³¹ Restating the value erosion implications of gas flaring to the Nigerian economy, the Chief Executive of the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Development Commission affirmed that gas flaring is fraught with deleterious health and environmental consequences.³²

A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report has exposed the alarming fact that a staggering eight million cubic feet of natural gas are incinerated daily in the Niger Delta, casting a blazing glow across the region³³. This rampant gas flaring has devastating consequences, including the destruction of fisheries, contamination of agricultural land, and acceleration of global warming, all without any discernible benefit. MOSOP's statement paints a dire picture of the devastating impact of gas flaring on the Ogoni people. The organization lamented that:³⁴ ‘the Ogoni countryside, once a haven of natural beauty, fresh air, and lush vegetation, has been ravaged by the relentless gas flaring.’³⁵ The stark reality is that the flares, situated perilously close to villages, have brought nothing but destruction, desolation, and death to the land, communities, and ecosystems, as the extreme heat generated by the flares has rendered the area incapable of supporting plant life.³⁶

Nigeria's government has been actively working to eliminate gas flaring over the years, but despite setting deadlines, the implementation of policies and enforcement of penalties have been consistently

²⁶ Section 104 of the Petroleum Industry Act of 2021 provides for instances when gas can be flared.

²⁷ Section 105 of the Petroleum Industry Act provides that penalty shall be paid “pursuant to the Flare Gas (Prevention of Waste and Pollution) Regulation”, which Regulation now exists as the Gas Flaring, Venting, and Methane Emissions (Prevention of Waste and Pollution) Regulations, 2023.

²⁸ Akaakar, F.O., “Natural Gas Development in Nigeria”, *Rivers State University Journal of Public Law R/S UJPL* Vol.1 2003, 198-256, at 217.

²⁹ *ibid.* See also Nnimmo Bassey “Gas Flaring: Assaulting Communities, Jeopardizing the World” being the text of the paper presented at the National Environmental Consultation Organized by the Environmental Rights Action in Conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Environment held in Abuja between 10-11 December, 2008.

³⁰ Nnimmo Bassey, *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* See also: (a) Gobo, A. E.; Richard G., and Ubong I.U., “Health Impact of Gas Flares on Igwuruta / Umuechem Communities in Rivers State”, *Journal of Applied Sciences and Environmental Management*, September, 2009 Vol. 13(3) 27–33, <http://www.bioline.org.br/pdf?ja09034> in which analysis of medical records showed a greater frequency of disease types such as Asthma, Cough, breathing difficulty, eye/skin irritation in (Igwuruta/Umuechem), (b) Maduka O, Tobin-West C. “Is living in a gas-flaring host community associated with being hypertensive? Evidence from the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.” *BMJ Glob Health* 2017;2:e000413. doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2017-000413. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5717961/pdf/bmjgh-2017-000413.pdf>.

³² Gbenga Komolafe, Chief Executive of the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Development Commission, “The wasteful disposal of natural gas is not only fraught with deleterious health/ environmental consequences but also a major source of resource waste and value erosion to the country.” <https://ngfcp.nuprc.gov.ng> [accessed on 23rd October, 2023]

³³ Nigeria ranks 37 amongst 218 countries on the CIA world factbook on carbon dioxide emissions country comparisons report, emitting 118,699,000 metric tonnes of CO₂. Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/carbon-dioxide-emissions/country-comparison/> [accessed 10th February 2025].

³⁴ Ken Saro-Wiwa “They are killing my People” in Na’Allah (ed.) “*Ogoni’s Agonies*,” Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 329-359.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

pushed back.³⁷ The government's efforts to address gas flaring date back to 1969, when President Gowon issued a directive for oil companies to halt gas flaring and develop infrastructure to harness associated gas within a five-year period. The initial goal was to eliminate gas flaring by 1973, but the oil industry's lack of urgency led to a revised deadline of 1979, which was ultimately missed due to a government transition in 1975.³⁸ The passage of the Associated Gas Re-Injection Act in 1979 mandated oil producers to achieve zero flaring by January 1, 1984. However, that deadline was repeatedly pushed back, with President Olusegun Obasanjo extending it to January 1, 2008, upon taking office in 1999, highlighting the persistent challenges in addressing this critical environmental issue. The repeated postponements, with another deadline set for December 2012,³⁹ exposed a glaring lack of resolve and commitment from the government to tackle the long-standing issues plaguing the Niger Delta communities. Having become a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1994, subsequently ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Climate Change Agreement in 2004 and 2017 respectively, coupled with the embrace of the Global Gas Flaring Reduction Partnership (GGFR) principles for global flare-out by 2030 as a signatory thereto, the Federal Government now commits to a national flare-out target by year 2025.⁴⁰

Moreover, the unrelenting gas flaring poses a significant threat to the health and wellbeing of the people, effectively jeopardizing their fundamental right to life. In response to this crisis, Environmental Rights Action did not mince words to emphasize the need for urgent and meaningful action, when it stated that:⁴¹

"The flaring of associated gas (AG) in the Niger Delta is a human right, environmental and economic monstrosity. Nowhere else in the world has communities been subjected to it on such a scale. It estimated to cost Nigeria as \$ 2.5 billion annually, while the roaring, toxic flares affect the health and livelihoods of Delta inhabitants. It is estimated that 66% Nigeria live below the poverty line."

B. OIL SPILLAGE

The commencement of oil exploration and production activities in the Niger Delta triggered a cascade of environmental destruction and socio-economic hardship in the region.⁴² The various stages of oil extraction, from initial exploration to full-scale production, have collectively taken a devastating toll on the environment, yielding severe pollution and ecological damage.⁴³ The environment is considered polluted when human actions alter its natural state, making it less suitable for its intended uses⁴⁴. A prime example of this is the pervasive issue of oil spills in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region, which poses significant environmental harm and is a major concern for the area.

Petroleum leakages onto the earth's surface are referred to as oil spills. Regrettably, the Niger Delta's oil industry is prone to frequent oil spills,⁴⁵ which have caused prolonged suffering for the region. These

³⁷Nnimmo Bassey "Gas Flaring, Assaulting Communities, Jeopardizing the World" Retrieved from <http://milieudefensie.nl/pubcaties/rapporten/gas-flaring-assaulting-communities-jeopardizing-the-world> [accessed on the 29th April 2024].

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Nigerian Gas Flare Commercialisation Programme. <https://ngfcp.nufcp.nuprc.gov.ng> [accessed 18th February 2025].

⁴¹ Environmental Right Action "Gas Flaring in Nigeria: Human Rights, Environment and Economy Monstrosity" Retrieved from http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/gas_flaring_nigeria.pdf [accessed on the 29th April 2024].

⁴² Francis C. Anyim, Cyril Oseloka Ikemefuna and Joy Onyinyechi Ekwoaba, "Conflict and Environmental Challenges Facing the Oil Companies in Nigeria Niger-Delta Region" (2012) Volume 2 No. 3, International Journal of Business and Management Tomorrow, 1-9.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Eregha P.B. and Irughe I.R., "Oil Induced Environmental Degradation in the Nigeria's Niger Delta: The Multiplier Effects" (2009) Vol.11 No. 4, Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 160-175; Frynas G.J., "Legal Change in Africa, Evidence from Oil-Related Litigation in Nigeria" (1999) Vol. 43, No. 2, Journal of African Law, 128

spills, occurring both onshore and offshore, have severe consequences. On land, they ravage crops and degrade soil fertility, threatening the agricultural livelihoods of local communities.⁴⁶ In water bodies, oil spills devastate aquatic life, contaminate water sources, and compromise the health and wellbeing of people who depend on these waters for drinking, domestic use, and fishing.⁴⁷ Research conducted by the Amnesty Organization has shed light on the destructive consequences of oil pollution in the Niger Delta, identifying corroded pipelines, substandard infrastructure, refinery leaks, human negligence, and intentional destruction as primary causes of oil spills.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the oil industry has conveniently shifted the narrative, pinning the blame on sabotage as the main culprit behind oil spills, seemingly as a tactic to dodge accountability and compensation obligations. The contamination of water sources by oil spills has severe consequences, rendering them unusable for essential purposes like cooking, bathing, and drinking. These water sources are often the only ones available to local communities, who rely on them for their daily needs. Unfortunately, exposure to oil-polluted water, particularly through bathing, can trigger a host of debilitating health issues, including skin conditions, cancer, and respiratory diseases, with the severity of these conditions linked to the extent of exposure.

The Niger Delta has lacked comprehensive empirical data on the full extent of oil spills since oil operations began in the region. However, existing records provide insight into the scope of the issue. Notably, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) reported an annual average of 221 oil spills between 1989 and 1994, with approximately 7,350 barrels of oil spilled each year, as documented in their 1995 report. In another incident, Mobil's 1998 oil spill in Eket released 40,000 barrels of light crude oil into the environment. Furthermore, records show that between 1976 and 1990, a staggering 2,796 oil spills occurred, resulting in the loss of over 2.1 million barrels of oil. A 2006 report by the United Nations Development Programme revealed that the region experienced a total of 6,817 oil spills between 1976 and 2001, with approximately three million barrels of oil lost. Notably, the report also highlighted that more than 70% of the spilled oil was not recovered, exacerbating the environmental damage. According to an alternative account, the Department of Petroleum Resources, under the Federal Government, documented 5,724 oil spills, resulting in an estimated 2,571,114 barrels of oil being released into the environment between 1976 and 1998. However, a 2006 investigation by a team of independent experts and oil specialists in the Niger Delta yielded a significantly higher estimate, suggesting that between 9 and 13 million barrels of oil had been spilled in the region over the preceding 50 years, encompassing both onshore and offshore incidents. No records are available from the Department of Petroleum regarding the incidence of oil spills from 1999 to the present day. However, Shell BP's own records reveal that the company suffered 1,100 oil spills between 2006 and 2011, resulting in a significant environmental impact with approximately 295,000 barrels of oil released into the environment during that period. The Niger Delta region has been plagued by human rights abuses for over five decades, with the oil industry's operations posing a persistent threat to the lives and livelihoods of current and future generations. The stark reality, as revealed by the statistics, is that unless robust regulatory frameworks are put in place to govern oil activities in the region, the destructive consequences will continue to have a profoundly negative impact on both the local communities and generations yet to come.

The data highlights the deplorable living conditions faced by the people of the Niger Delta since the onset of oil extraction in the region. The severe environmental degradation has severely compromised their fundamental rights, putting their well-being at significant risk. This grim reality is underscored by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which noted that the extreme pollution and environmental devastation in Ogoniland have rendered life there a perpetual nightmare.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Amnesty international, "*Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta*," Amnesty International Publications, United Kingdom, 2009, 14-17.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁴⁹ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Right, Decision on Communication of the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (155/96).

3. THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

The devastating consequences of oil spills and gas flaring include a heightened risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as chest pain and congestion.⁵⁰ In the aftermath of oil spills, local communities are often forced to breathe air contaminated with oil, gas, and other pollutants,⁵¹ leading to widespread reports of respiratory issues, skin problems, and other serious health concerns. In extreme cases, oil spills can even result in significant loss of life. The fundamental importance of a healthy environment to human well-being is a cornerstone of human rights law, underscoring the urgent need to protect communities from the hazardous impacts of oil spills and gas flaring.⁵² Severe environmental degradation has ravaged the Niger Delta, leaving communities to contend with a plethora of serious health problems. Regrettably, there has been a marked lack of progress in addressing the critical issues of water contamination, food insecurity, and the debilitating health effects of oil pollution. Furthermore, experts and non-governmental organizations have persistently expressed concerns regarding the inadequate safeguards in place to protect food sources compromised by oil spills and other pollutants.⁵³ Residents of communities impacted by oil spills have described the disturbing experience of consuming fish that tastes eerily similar to kerosene, often resulting in stomach ailments. Moreover, the frequent combination of oil spills and fires has led to a surge in respiratory issues, skin lesions, and other health problems, which have become a pervasive worry for the people of the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta communities have consistently voiced concerns that gas flaring has drastically diminished their quality of life, while also posing serious health risks.⁵⁴ The relentless, round-the-clock flaring in many areas not only generates noise pollution but also jeopardizes the livelihoods of local residents. Furthermore, the flaring process often leaves behind residual oil droplets that settle on waterways, crops, homes, and even individuals, leading to widespread environmental degradation and health hazards.⁵⁵ The government's inadequate oversight of pollution's health impacts effectively leaves its citizens vulnerable to significant harm, neglecting its duty to safeguard their well-being.⁵⁶ Oil pollution, notably, has a devastating toll, accounting for a staggering number of daily deaths, surpassing those attributed to other environmental concerns.⁵⁷ The primary culprit is the contamination of water sources, which, when used for drinking, cooking, and hygiene, can lead to severe health issues, including painful skin rashes resulting from bathing in polluted water.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Terisa Turner and M.O. Oshare, "Women's Uprisings against the Nigerian Oil Industry," in Terisa Turner and Bryan Ferguson (eds.), *Arise! Ye Mighty People!: Gender, Class & Race in Popular Struggles*, Trenton: Africa World, 1994; Kingsley Osadolor, "The Rise of the Women of the Niger Delta," (2002) *World Press Review*, New York, 47.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Elias Courson, "The Burden of Oil: Social Deprivation and Political Militancy in Gbaramatu Clan, Warri South West LGA, Delta State, Nigeria" United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC, USA, 2007, 1-51; Tony Tebekaemi (ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, Benin-City: Umeh Publishers, 1982, 64,116 &117; J.O.S Ayomike, *The Ijaw in Warri: A Study In Ethnography*, Benini-City: Mayomi Publishers, 1990, 9

⁵³ Alagoa E.J., *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005, 46

⁵⁴ Sir Alan Burns, *History of Nigeria*, London: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1969, John Hatch, *Nigeria*, London: HEB Ltd, 1971; Diepreye Alamiyeseigha, 'Energy, Environment and Disaster: The Niger Delta Experience' being a lecture delivered as Governor of Bayelsa at the International Conference on Energy, Environment and Disaster, Charlotte, North Carolina, U.S.A, July24, 2005, 6

⁵⁵ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and A Day: A Detention Diary*, London: Penguin Books, 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide In Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Alagoa E.J., *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 1972; Alagoa E.J. (ed.), *The land and People of Bayelsa State:Central Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 1999; William Moore, *History of Itsekiri*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1970; Michael Crowder, *Colonial West Africa*, London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1978.

In recent decades, public awareness of the severe consequences of environmental pollution on human well-being and quality of life has grown substantially.⁵⁹ As human activities continue to exact a heavy toll on the natural environment, the detrimental effects of these actions have intensified significantly,⁶⁰ underscoring the pressing need for environmentally responsible practices and conservation efforts. Health is a fundamental aspect of daily lives, unaffected by factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity. We inherently value our health as our most precious and irreplaceable resource. Conversely, compromised health can severely impact our daily routines, hindering our ability to attend school, work, or participate in social activities, and even affecting our capacity to manage household responsibilities.⁶¹ Ultimately, health is often the underlying concern when we discuss safety, well-being, or quality of life.

One of the targets of the global goal to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, is to substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination by 2030. The indicators are mortality rate attributed to:

- household and ambient air pollution;
- unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services); and
- unintentional poisoning.⁶²

Whilst the relevant federal government agencies responsible for implementing the SDGs in Nigeria present impressive implementation reports on achievements at the national level, the realities in the Niger Delta region are far from impressive. One of the key messages from the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 was that SDG Implementation was too slow, and even regressing in some areas like climate action, biodiversity loss and inequality. The Niger Delta field report would suffice as a case study.

Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right, essential for maintaining dignity and overall well-being. The concept of achieving the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is well-established and not a new idea. In fact, it was first formally recognized in the 1946 Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO), which pioneered a holistic definition of health as **"a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being" that goes beyond merely being free from illness or disability.**⁶³ The preamble also declares that access to the highest achievable standard of health is a fundamental right inherent to every human being, without exception or discrimination based on factors such as race, religion, political ideology, economic status, or social position.⁶⁴

Typically, the right to health is associated with healthcare access and hospital infrastructure, but this narrow view only partially captures the essence of this fundamental right. In reality, the right to health is multifaceted, encompassing a wide array of factors that collectively enable individuals to lead healthy

⁵⁹ See Eleanor Kinney and Brian Clark, "Provisions for Health and Health Care in the Constitutions of the Countries of the World" (2004) 37 *Cornell International Law Journal*, 285

⁶⁰ See the Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 6, Para. 5 on the right to life: "The right to life has been too often narrowly interpreted. The expression 'inherent right to life' cannot properly be understood in a restrictive manner, and the protection of this right requires that states adopt positive measures. In this connection, the Committee considers that it would be desirable for states parties to take all possible measures to reduce infant mortality and to increase life expectancy, especially in adopting measures to eliminate malnutrition and epidemics." Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 6 on the right to life*, 30 April 1982, UNDoc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6, at 127 (2003).

⁶¹ Gruskin S, Loff B., "Do Human Rights Have a Role in Public Health Work? (2002) *The Lancet*, 360:1880 quoted in Judith Asher, "The Right to Health: A Resource Manual to NGOs" London, Commonwealth Medical Trust, 2004, retrieved from <http://srhrl.aaas.org/manuals/health/RTH.pdf> from [accessed on 24th November, 2024].

⁶² SDG Goal 3, Target 3.9, Indicators 3.9.1, 3.9.2, and 3.9.3. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3#targets_and_indicators [accessed on 14th February 2025].

⁶³ Similar provisions is contained in the World Health Organization Basic Documents Forty-Fifth Amendments Edition adopted by the Fifty first World Health Assembly, 2006 available at http://www.who.int/governance/eb/who_constitution_en.pdf [accessed on 26th November, 2023].

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

lives.⁶⁵ These factors, dubbed "**underlying determinants of health**" by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, highlight the intricate relationships between various elements that shape our overall health and well-being.⁶⁶ These fundamental elements comprise: reliable access to clean water and proper sanitation, availability of wholesome and uncontaminated food, sufficient nutrition and secure housing, safe and healthy environments, both at work and in general, access to relevant health knowledge, education, and information and promotion of gender equality.⁶⁷ Moreover, the right to health encompasses proactive disease prevention and control measures, as well as the elimination of hazardous factors that could lead to illness or compromised health.

The intrinsic connections between human rights mean that they are mutually reinforcing and interwoven. Consequently, neglecting the right to health can have far-reaching consequences, often undermining the fulfillment of other essential rights, such as education and employment, with the inverse also holding true.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the prominence afforded to the "underlying determinants of health" – encompassing the social, economic, and environmental factors that underpin health beyond medical care – underscores the reciprocal relationship between the right to health and the realization of multiple human rights.⁶⁹ These encompass a range of rights, including access to nutritious food, clean water, secure housing, a decent standard of living, privacy, information, freedom from discriminatory practices, and the benefits of scientific advancements. Additionally, they include the right to participate. The UN Committee responsible for implementing and enforcing the Covenant has further clarified that:⁷⁰

"The right to health embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life, and extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as.....a healthy environment"

For decades, the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria has been plagued by devastating environmental consequences stemming from oil operations, imperiling the lives of local residents and violating their right to a healthy environment.⁷¹ The pervasive contamination of water sources has left many communities with no choice but to rely on polluted streams and creeks for their daily water needs.⁷² Local communities' concerns about the health impacts of consuming polluted water have fallen on deaf ears, as systematic water quality monitoring remains nonexistent.⁷³ Moreover, while oil companies may provide temporary water supplies in response to spills, these measures are often insufficient, short-lived, and neglect the needs of communities beyond the spill's immediate vicinity.⁷⁴

Extensive exposure to oil spills can have devastating health consequences. Community members affected by oil spills frequently report suffering from skin problems and respiratory issues as a direct result of the spill. Furthermore, the people of the Niger Delta have long voiced concerns that the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comments No. 14 (2000) on the Right to Highest Standard of Health (Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, E/C.12/2000/4, Para 15.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Lain Byrne, "Enforcing the Right to Health: Innovative Lessons from Domestic Courts." retrieved from http://www.swisshumanrightsbook.com/SHRB/shrb_03_files/37_453_Byrne.pdf [accessed 24th November, 2023]

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comments No. 14 (2000) on the Right to Highest Standard of Health (Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, E/C.12/2000/4, Para 15.

⁷¹ Ill health is linked to contact with perilous water, lack of clean water, lack of cleanliness, and poor running of water resources. Nearly all diarrhoeal disease in the world is attributable to unclean water, sanitation and hygiene. In 2002, diarrhoea attributable to these three features resulted into approximately 2.7 per cent of deaths (1.5 million) worldwide

⁷² For more detail view see, Amnesty international, "Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta" Amnesty international, London, 35

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

persistent gas flaring has severely impacted their quality of life,⁷⁵ posing a significant threat to their health and well-being. The relentless burning of gas flares, which can last for 24 hours a day in multiple areas, has a profoundly negative impact on the well-being of nearby communities, causing considerable hardship and discomfort. A medical expert cited in a report by Amnesty International on the Niger Delta region of Nigeria noted that:⁷⁶

“While direct evidence of the effects of gas flares on pregnant women is lacking, they are nonetheless more vulnerable to airborne pollutants during pregnancy. Studies from similar contexts have revealed a correlation between exposure to oil-related pollutants and adverse maternal health outcomes, including increased risk of spontaneous abortion.”

The government's response to the environmental health crisis in the Niger Delta has been remarkably indifferent, prioritizing economic gains over the well-being of its citizens. As long as the oil revenue keeps pouring in, the government seems unwilling to address the devastating impact of environmental pollution on the region.

Ironically, while the government is quick to offer humanitarian aid to other areas affected by environmental disasters, it has neglected its own backyard, abandoning the Niger Delta to suffer from the catastrophic effects of oil exploration and exploitation. This paradox raises serious questions about the government's priorities and commitment to protecting the health and environment of its own people. The African Commission's findings were stark: Nigeria had failed in its duty to protect the environment, and the resulting pollution and degradation in Ogoniland, Niger Delta, had reached catastrophic levels, making life unbearable for the residents.⁷⁷ However, the Commission's assertion only scratched the surface. The truth is that the devastating impact of environmental degradation extends far beyond Ogoniland, affecting the entire Niger Delta region.⁷⁸ The once-thriving communities are now grappling with the consequences of unchecked pollution, which has rendered living conditions practically impossible.

The landmark case of *Mr. Jonah Gbemre v. Shell Petroleum Development Company Nig. Ltd. And Ors.* exemplifies the Nigerian judiciary's willingness to adopt a broad interpretation of the constitutional right to life, effectively expanding its scope to encompass the right to a clean and healthy environment. A pivotal moment in the Niger Delta's struggle against gas flaring occurred on November 14, 2005, when a Nigerian Federal High Court issued a landmark Judgement.⁷⁹ That decision marked a significant turning point in the local communities' fight to protect their health, environment, and farmlands from the devastating effects of gas flaring. The case was brought by Mr. Gbemre, representing himself and the Iwehereken community in Delta State, against Shell Nigeria, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and the Attorney General of the Federation. Below is the summary of the reliefs sought by the Applicant, to address the environmental and health hazards caused by gas flaring in the region. A declaration that the:

- i). fundamental rights to life and dignity, as enshrined in Sections 33(1) and 34(1) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution and further reinforced by Articles 4, 16, and 24 of the African Charter on

⁷⁵ Anja Roth, “Environmental Destruction and Human Rights in the Niger Delta”, retrieved from http://www.freedomfromfearmagazine.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=229:environmental-destruction-and-human-rights-in-the-niger-delta&catid=49:issue-6&Itemid=186 [accessed on 24th November, 2023]

⁷⁶ Amnesty international, “Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta” Amnesty international, London, 36.

⁷⁷ African commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Decision on Communication of the Social and Economic Rights Action Center and the Center for Economic and Social Rights/Nigeria (155/96), Para 70. Decision of the 30th ordinary session of the African Commission of Human and Peoples’ Rights, Banjul, 13-27 October 2001.

⁷⁸ Pan American Health Organization, “Human Rights and Health: Indigenous Peoples”, retrieved from <http://www.paho.org/english/dd/pub/10069-indigPeople.pdf>. [accessed on 24th November, 2023]; Vera Coelho and Alex Shankland, “Making the Right to Health a Reality for Brazil’s Indigenous Peoples: Innovation, Decentralization and Equity”, http://www.medicc.org/mediccreview/article/mr_211.pdf [accessed on 24th November, 2023].

⁷⁹ Judgement of the Federal High Court of Nigeria Benin in SUIT NO: FHC,B,CS/53/05; (2005) AHRLR 151 (NgHC 2005)

Human and Peoples' Rights, inherently encompass the right to a clean, healthy, and pollution-free environment, free from toxic substances;

ii) defendants' actions have breached the applicants' fundamental rights, including: the right to life and personal dignity, the right to optimal physical and mental health and the right to a safe, healthy, and thriving environment that supports their well-being and development;

iii) first and second defendants' failure to conduct an environmental impact assessment in the applicant's community, regarding the effects of gas flaring, constitutes a breach of Section 2(2) of the Environmental Impact Assessment Act. That omission has contributed significantly to the violation of the applicant's fundamental rights to life, dignity, and overall well-being;

iv) provisions allowing continued gas flaring in Nigeria, as outlined in the Associated Gas Re-Injection Act and Regulations, contradict the constitutional rights to life and dignity (Sections 33(1) and 34(1)) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Articles 4, 16, and 24). As such, these provisions are deemed unconstitutional, invalid, and unenforceable, pursuant to Section 1(3) of the Constitution; and that

v) the court issues a perpetual injunction, prohibiting the first and second defendants, their agents, employees, contractors, or any other representatives from engaging in further gas flaring activities within the applicant's community.

The court ruled that the continued gas flaring by the 1st and 2nd Respondents during oil exploration and production in the applicant's community constitutes a breach of the fundamental rights to life, a healthy environment, and human dignity, as protected by the Constitution and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The court further ordered that Shell Nigeria and NNPC (1st and 2nd Respondents) must immediately cease gas flaring activities in the applicant's community and take prompt measures to prevent future flaring. The court issued the following declaratory order:

1. The Nigerian Constitution (Sections 33(1) and 34(1)) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Articles 4, 16, and 24) collectively guarantee the fundamental rights to life, dignity, and a healthy environment, which necessarily includes the right to live in an environment free from pollution, poison, and other hazards.

2. The ongoing gas flaring by the 1st and 2nd Respondents during oil exploration and production in the Applicant's community infringes upon the community's constitutional and charter-guaranteed rights to a healthy environment, life, and dignity.

3. The provisions of the Associated Gas Reinjection Act (Section 3(2)(a) and (b)) and the Associated Gas Reinjection Regulations (Section 1.43 of 1984), which allow for continued gas flaring in Nigeria, are in conflict with the Applicant's constitutionally guaranteed rights to life and dignity, as reinforced by the African Charter. Consequently, these provisions are deemed unconstitutional, invalid, and unenforceable, as stipulated in Section 1(3) of the Nigerian Constitution.

The *Gbemre V. Shell* case is a groundbreaking precedent in Nigerian law, as it marks the first time a court has deemed gas flaring illegal, unconstitutional, and a violation of the right to life, ordering its immediate halt. This landmark ruling illustrates the devastating impact of gas flaring and environmental degradation on human life, holding profound significance for the people of Nigeria. The *Gbemre V. Shell* case has two significant implications. Firstly, it illustrates how ongoing gas flaring in the Niger Delta jeopardizes the right to life, while also demonstrating that environmental degradation can be addressed as a human rights issue. Secondly, the case sets a precedent by broadening the interpretation of the right to life to encompass environmental protection and the right to a healthy environment, highlighting the intrinsic link between human well-being and environmental sustainability. Given that environmental degradation undeniably impairs the exercise of basic human rights, it is entirely reasonable to integrate environmental concerns into the realm of human rights, without any logical contradiction.

4. CONCLUSION

Given the profound truth that health is a vital component of overall well-being, it is crucial to investigate the health consequences of environmental degradation. The Niger Delta region has borne the brunt of devastating oil spills and gas flaring, resulting in widespread pollution that gravely threatens the health of its inhabitants. Furthermore, these activities have led to a scarcity of arable land, jeopardizing the very survival of local communities. A healthy population is the cornerstone of sustainable development, as it enables individuals to contribute to progress, escape poverty, and protect their environment. The primary rationale for environmental conservation is to ensure the well-being of communities. This concept is eloquently encapsulated in Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which recognizes humans as the central focus of sustainable development efforts and affirms their right to a life of health, productivity, and balance with the natural world. Health plays a pivotal role in shaping human and societal development, and therefore, it is imperative to safeguard it against activities that could jeopardize its attainment. The 17 global sustainable development goals recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth, while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests. The extractive industry operations in the Niger Delta aggravates the climate change incidence and the weak resilience capability of the region.

Many of the environmental challenges in the region arise due to the lack of thorough environmental impact assessments (EIA) prior to project implementation. Conducting EIAs would help identify potential risks and enable the implementation of mitigating measures to minimize harm to the environment and local communities. To address the environmental concerns, the government must undertake a prompt and thorough environmental audit of the oil and gas industry's operations in the region, ensuring adherence to international best practices. Additionally, the government should mandate Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for all future projects, prioritizing sustainable development, environmental protection, and human rights. “Humanity, *in particular the inhabitants of the Niger Delta*⁸⁰, risks prolonged periods of crisis and uncertainty triggered by and reinforcing poverty, inequality, hunger, disease, conflict and disaster without urgent course correction and acceleration toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁸¹

Times of crisis necessitate times of change. The intensity of crisis that the Niger Delta region has experienced underscores the urgency for change in the narratives. The science for accelerating Niger Delta transformation to development should be given a priority in Nigeria.

⁸⁰ Emphasis mine.

⁸¹ “Global Sustainable Development Report 2023” https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/GSDR%202023%20Key%20Messages_1.pdf