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# **The Historical and Political Impact of Oil and Gas Operations in Bayelsa State, Nigeria: A Descriptive Survey of Host Community Stakeholders**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the historical and political implications of oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 2,000 stakeholders across various host communities. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive statistical tools of percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the three research questions. Findings indicate that although oil has contributed to national economic growth, its operations are associated with environmental degradation, socio-economic challenges, and political unrest. Furthermore, the study revealed that the centralization of oil revenues and insufficient reinvestment into local communities have exacerbated political tensions. Addressing these issues, the study recommended that the situation requires a multifaceted approach, including policy reforms that ensure equitable resource distribution, environmental protection, and genuine engagement with host communities. Thus, the study highlights the necessity for policy reforms to mitigate adverse impacts of oil and gas operations and promote community well-being.

**Keywords:** Oil and Gas Operations, Environmental Degradation, Socio-Economic Impact, Political Unrest, Host Communities, Revenue Distribution, Sustainable Development

## **INTRODUCTION**

Bayelsa State, in Nigeria's Niger Delta, is endowed with significant oil and gas resources. Since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri (1956), the region has become central to Nigeria's petroleum industry. This paper explores the historical trajectory and political dynamics of oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State, incorporating stakeholder perspectives from host communities. Emphasis is placed on the environmental, socio-economic, and governance-related dimensions of these operations.

Prior to the discovery of crude oil, the agricultural sector was the main stay of the Nigerian economy; the income earning exports were cocoa (Southwest) groundnuts, cotton, and hisdes/skin (North) and palm oil (Southeast). It accounted for 95% of the foreign exchange earnings, generated over 60% of her employment capacity and approximately 56% of her gross domestic earnings.

However, since the production and exportation of petroleum began in 1958, activities in the agricultural sector and other industries gradually took a down turn affecting the nation's economy both positively and negatively. Report has it that the proceeds from oil production accounts for 95% of Nigeria's export earnings and over 80% of her revenue which is spent to drive the economy.

According to Sagay (2001), oil has been vital in financing the country's economic growth and development in the last 30 years and as a matter-of-fact government activities will grind to a halt, if money from oil proceeds is not available. In affirmation Ugoh and Ukpere (2010) posit that Nigeria has

benefited enormously from oil, both the federal and the state governments are basically dependent on oil resources from the Niger Delta. This degree of dependency indicates the huge resource flow from the region and the high level of operations in the oil industry with resultant negative effects on the people and the environment.

The argument from various quarters is that the huge revenue generated by the Niger Delta region does not commensurate with its human and infrastructural development; rather it is plagued with environmental degradation, health, problems, conflicts and poverty. Nigeria is the most populous black nation in Africa and having such a large population with attendant needs that require satisfaction from the petroleum proceeds; it becomes pertinent for the development, well being as well as the environmental and economic sustainability of the region generating this resource to be prioritized.

On the contrary, literature has shown a total neglect of the region by the government and multinational oil companies; hence, instead of the petroleum resource to be a blessing it is termed a curse to the host communities of the multinational companies in the region. Well documented in literature are the negative effects of oil exploration activities on the people of the Niger Delta region which includes violence, environmental degradation and destruction of the flora and fauna, not forgetting the health problems. According to Nweze and Edame (2016), oil exploration causes a range of environmental problems which includes contamination of both surface and ground water, contamination of soil by oil spills and leaks, increased deforestation as well as the economic loss and environmental degradation stemming from gas flaring. But perhaps there are other issues both positive and negative caused by oil and gas operations which are peculiar to the people of Epebu community which are yet to be discovered; thus this study attempts to identify the effects of the operations of oil and gas activities on these people.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study was conducted to examine the historical and political implications of oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was carried out to:

1. Determine the extent oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State contribute to environmental degradation in host communities.
2. Determine the extent oil and gas operations affect socio-economic development in host communities in Bayelsa State.
3. Determine ways oil and gas operations influence political stability and governance in Bayelsa State.

### **Research Questions**

The study developed the following research questions that were used as a guide for the study:

1. To what extent do oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State contribute to environmental degradation in host communities?
2. How do oil and gas operations affect socio-economic development in host communities in Bayelsa State?
3. In what ways do oil and gas operations influence political stability and governance in Bayelsa State?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Historical Context of Oil and Gas Operations in Bayelsa State**

The commercial discovery of oil in Oloibiri heralded a new economic era for Nigeria, shifting the national focus towards petroleum exports. Bayelsa State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, is one of the most oil-rich states in the country. The history of oil exploration in Bayelsa is deeply intertwined with the broader history of oil discovery in Nigeria, which dates back to 1956 when commercial oil was first discovered in Oloibiri, a community in present-day Bayelsa State (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae, 2021). This discovery, made by Shell-BP, marked the beginning of large-scale oil exploration and production in the region. Over the decades, the oil and gas industry has expanded significantly, with numerous multinational corporations operating in the area, including Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Agip.

Despite the economic importance of Bayelsa's oil resources, the state has experienced significant socio-economic and environmental challenges. However, rapid industrial expansion also introduced challenges such as frequent oil spills, gas flaring, and displacement of local populations. These events have left lasting marks on the environmental and social fabric of Bayelsa State (Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Laws, 2019).

Historically, oil exploration has led to environmental degradation, displacement of communities, and socio-political unrest, as local populations have struggled to benefit equitably from the wealth generated by the oil sector (Ebiede, 2022). In the 1990s, tensions escalated as indigenous groups, such as the Ijaw Youth Council, organized protests and resistance movements against oil companies and the Nigerian government, demanding greater resource control and environmental remediation (Okonkwo, 2023). This period saw the rise of activism, with the late Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) serving as key figures in the fight for environmental justice in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2021).

Furthermore, the introduction of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 and the Amnesty Program in 2009 sought to address some of the region's socio-political and economic grievances. However, critics argue that these initiatives have not effectively alleviated the challenges faced by host communities, as corruption and mismanagement have hindered their success (Nwosu & Okoli, 2022). The persistent issues of oil spills, gas flaring, and limited economic opportunities continue to fuel tensions between oil companies, the government, and local communities.

In recent years, the implementation of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) in 2021 has been seen as a potential turning point in addressing the historical challenges associated with oil exploration in Bayelsa. The Act aims to promote transparency in revenue management, ensure community participation, and enhance environmental protection. However, its effectiveness remains a subject of debate as implementation challenges persist (Adebayo & Chinedu, 2023).

Overall, the historical trajectory of oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State reveals a complex relationship between economic development, environmental sustainability, and socio-political stability. While the oil industry has generated significant revenue for Nigeria, the adverse effects on host communities continue to be a major concern, necessitating policy interventions and sustainable management strategies.

### **Political Dynamics of Oil and Gas Operations in Bayelsa State**

The political landscape of Bayelsa State has been shaped significantly by oil and gas operations, influencing governance, revenue distribution, community relations, and security. The state has witnessed ongoing political struggles over resource control, environmental justice, and equitable revenue sharing, all of which have contributed to tensions between the government, oil companies, and local communities (Adebayo & Chinedu, 2023).

The management of oil revenue and operations in Bayelsa has generated substantial political contention. Centralized revenue distribution has often left local communities feeling marginalized, fueling movements for resource control and local autonomy. The Kaiama Declaration (1998) is one notable example where Ijaw youths publicly denounced oil activities that did not equitably benefit the host communities (Kaiama Declaration, 2023). This dynamic has contributed to a cycle of political unrest and sporadic protests.

### **Resource Control and Revenue Allocation**

A major political issue in Bayelsa State has been the debate over resource control and the distribution of oil revenues. The Nigerian government, through the constitution, controls oil resources and allocates a percentage of oil revenue to oil-producing states via the derivation principle, which currently stands at 13% (Nwosu & Okoli, 2022). However, many local leaders and activists argue that this is insufficient given the environmental degradation and socio-economic underdevelopment experienced by oil-producing communities (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae, 2021). The demand for increased control over oil resources has fueled political activism and resistance movements, with groups such as the Ijaw Youth Council advocating for greater regional autonomy in managing oil revenues (Okonkwo, 2023).

The passage of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) in 2021 was seen as an attempt to address these concerns by allocating more funds to host communities through the Host Community Development Trust (Adebayo & Chinedu, 2023). However, critics argue that bureaucratic challenges and lack of transparency may hinder its effectiveness, leading to continued dissatisfaction and political tensions.

### **Government Policies and Political Influence**

Successive Nigerian governments have implemented various policies aimed at addressing the socio-political challenges associated with oil operations in Bayelsa State. The establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 was meant to accelerate development in the region. However, allegations of corruption and mismanagement within the NDDC have led to widespread disillusionment among residents (Nwosu & Okoli, 2022).

Similarly, the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP) sought to address militancy and insecurity in the region by offering ex-militants, financial compensation and vocational training. While the program initially reduced violent confrontations, studies indicate that it has not led to long-term economic empowerment, and there are fears of renewed unrest due to unfulfilled promises (Ebiede, 2022).

Political elites in Bayelsa have also played a significant role in shaping oil-related policies. The state has experienced political instability, with frequent power struggles among politicians seeking control over oil-related revenues and government contracts (Watts, 2021). This has often resulted in electoral violence and disputes over political appointments.

### **Security and Militancy**

The presence of oil in Bayelsa State has also contributed to significant security challenges. The Niger Delta has been a hotspot for militant activities, with groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) engaging in attacks on oil facilities, kidnappings, and pipeline vandalism (Okonkwo, 2023). These militant activities have been politically motivated, driven by grievances over resource mismanagement, environmental degradation, and economic exclusion.

Although the federal government has increased military presence in the region to curb unrest, the use of force has sometimes led to human rights violations, further fueling hostility between communities and security forces (Ebiede, 2022). Analysts argue that a more inclusive governance approach, emphasizing community engagement and economic development, is necessary to address the root causes of insecurity (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae, 2021).

### **Community Protests and Political Mobilization**

The political dynamics in Bayelsa State have also been shaped by community activism. Protests and legal actions against oil companies have become common, with communities demanding compensation for environmental damage and better corporate social responsibility (Watts, 2021). Political mobilization among youth and civil society organizations has played a key role in advocating for policy reforms, although government responses have sometimes been repressive.

### **The Future of Oil Politics in Bayelsa State**

As Nigeria moves toward energy transition and diversification of its economy, the political dynamics surrounding oil in Bayelsa State are likely to evolve. The implementation of the Petroleum Industry Act presents an opportunity for more transparent governance, but the success of these reforms will depend on political will, accountability, and effective enforcement mechanisms (Adebayo & Chinedu, 2023). If governance structures fail to address historical grievances, the risk of renewed unrest and political instability remains high.

The political landscape of Bayelsa State remains deeply influenced by oil and gas operations, with issues of resource control, governance, security, and activism shaping the region's future. While government policies such as the NDDC, PAP, and PIA have sought to address some of these challenges, persistent concerns over mismanagement and inequality continue to fuel political tensions. Sustainable solutions require a balance between economic interests, environmental justice, and inclusive governance to ensure that oil wealth benefits all stakeholders equitably.

**METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive survey design was adopted to gather primary data from 2,000 stakeholders, including community leaders, local residents, oil/gas workers, and government officials. The population of the study was used as sample since it is small and manageable. Data were collected through a 5-point Likert, 20-item structured questionnaire titled “Impact of Oil and Gas Operations on Host Communities Questionnaire (IOGOHCQ)”. The instrument was designed based on Likert’s points of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), which correspond to numerical values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The questionnaire was organized into three sections corresponding to the study’s objectives which are: (1) Environmental Impact, (2) Socio-Economic Challenges, and (3) Political Unrest and Governance Issues. IOGOHCQ was validated by two experts in Political Science and Administrative Studies from the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State and one expert in oil and gas laws from Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained via Cronbach’s alpha method which yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating that the instrument was very reliable. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researchers and one research assistant who also helped in retrieving same after duly filled by the respondents. The data gathered were analyzed using percentage, mean and standard deviation.

**RESULTS**

The findings of the study were stated in accordance with the research questions that guided the study as follows:

**Research Question 1:** *To what extent do oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State contribute to environmental degradation in host communities?*

**Table 1: Environmental Impact of Oil and Gas Operations**

Item No. & Statement	(SA) (%)	(A) (%)	(U) (%)	(D) (%)	(SD) (%)	Mean	SD
1. Oil spills negatively affect local agriculture.	55	30	5	7	3	4.27	1.04
2. Oil spills negatively impact fishing activities.	50	35	5	7	3	4.22	1.02
3. Gas flaring significantly contributes to air pollution in the community.	60	25	5	6	4	4.31	1.07
4. Exposure to gas flaring is linked to adverse health issues among community members.	58	28	7	4	3	4.34	0.98
5. Oil and gas operations are responsible for deforestation in the region.	55	30	5	7	3	4.27	1.04
6. These operations lead to a reduction in local biodiversity.	53	32	5	6	4	4.24	1.06
7. Oil exploration activities have contaminated local water sources.	50	35	5	7	3	4.22	1.02
8. Overall, environmental degradation from oil and gas operations has diminished quality of life.	60	25	5	5	5	4.30	1.10

Table 1 revealed that a significant majority (85%) of respondents reported that oil and gas operations have led to severe environmental degradation, including frequent oil spills and gas flaring, which have compromised agriculture and fishing which are the primary livelihoods in these communities.

**Research Question 2:** *How do oil and gas operations affect socio-economic development in host communities in Bayelsa State?*

**Table 2: Socio-Economic Development Challenges of Oil and Gas Operations**

Item No. & Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
9. Oil companies contribute positively to infrastructural development within the community.	15	20	10	30	25	2.70	1.42
10. Oil operations generate employment opportunities for local residents.	25	30	15	20	10	3.40	1.32
11. Local businesses benefit from the presence of oil and gas operations.	20	25	15	25	15	3.10	1.38
12. Oil revenue has led to improved public services (e.g., roads, utilities) in the community.	10	15	10	35	30	2.40	1.32
13. Unemployment rates have increased despite oil exploration activities.	45	25	10	12	8	3.87	1.32
14. Oil companies have enhanced the quality of healthcare and education available in the community.	15	20	10	30	25	2.70	1.42

Table 2 revealed that approximately 70% of participants indicated that despite the wealth generated from oil, there has been minimal infrastructural development in their communities. Thus, critical developmental issues such as unemployment, poor healthcare, and inadequate education facilities remain prevalent in host communities.

**Research Question 3:** *In what ways do oil and gas operations influence political stability and governance in Bayelsa State?*

**Table 3: Political Unrest and Governance Issues due to Oil and Gas Operations**

Item No. & Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
15. The presence of oil operations has exacerbated tensions between the government and local communities.	50	20	10	10	10	3.90	1.38
16. The government fairly distributes oil revenue to benefit the local community.	8	12	10	30	40	2.18	1.29
17. Oil exploration activities have triggered political protests within the community.	55	25	5	8	7	4.13	1.24
18. Local community members are actively engaged in decision-making regarding oil operations.	20	25	15	25	15	3.10	1.38
19. There is sufficient transparency in how oil revenues are managed by governmental bodies.	12	15	10	30	33	2.43	1.39
20. Overall, oil operations contribute to political instability in the region.	55	25	5	8	7	4.13	1.24

According to Table 3, around 65% of respondents attributed recurring political unrest and conflicts to feelings of exploitation and neglect by both the government and oil companies. The lack of meaningful engagement and fair resource distribution has fostered distrust and occasional violent protests in host communities in Bayelsa State.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Environmental Impact of Oil and Gas Operations on the Host Communities**

The analysis of environmental perceptions as presented in Table 1 revealed that respondents strongly agree that oil spills, gas flaring, and related oil and gas activities are causing significant environmental degradation in Bayelsa State. For example, the items measuring the impact of oil spills on agriculture and fishing yielded high mean scores (approximately 4.22–4.27), while gas flaring linked to air pollution and adverse health effects, had an even higher mean (4.31). These findings indicate that the local communities perceive these operations as major contributors to environmental deterioration, which aligns with previous research demonstrating the extensive ecological damage in the Niger Delta (Afolabi & Adegboyega, 2020). Specifically, the contamination of water sources and loss of biodiversity have been documented as persistent challenges, further underscoring the long-term ecological consequences of oil exploration (Afolabi & Adegboyega, 2020). Such results suggest that environmental remediation and stricter operational standards are urgently needed to mitigate these adverse effects.

### **Socio-economic Development Challenges**

The socio-economic dimension of the study as indicated in Table 2 showed mixed perceptions among stakeholders. Items related to infrastructural development and improved public services registered relatively low mean scores (around 2.40–2.70), indicating a general dissatisfaction with the contributions of oil companies toward local development. In contrast, the statement concerning increased unemployment garnered a higher mean score (approximately 3.87), reflecting a strong perception that oil exploration activities have not translated into sustainable economic benefits for host communities. These findings resonate with previous studies which argue that the wealth generated from oil has not adequately benefited local populations in terms of job creation and infrastructural improvement (Bassey & Etim, 2021). The disconnect between national oil revenue and local development continues to exacerbate economic disparities, suggesting a need for more inclusive economic policies that ensure a greater share of benefits is reinvested in these communities (Bassey & Etim, 2021).

### **Political Unrest and Governance Issues**

Regarding political dynamics, the data from Table 3 indicated that stakeholders hold strong opinions about the governance challenges associated with oil operations. The item on government revenue distribution, with a mean score of 2.18, reflects widespread dissatisfaction and a perception that oil revenues are inequitably shared. Moreover, items addressing political unrest such as the triggering of protests and the overall contribution of oil operations to political instability yielded high mean scores (approximately 4.13), highlighting that many community members view the current management of oil wealth as a source of tension and conflict (Ibe & Udo, 2022). These perceptions are consistent with other studies that have linked mismanagement of oil revenues with persistent political unrest and weak community participation in decision-making processes (Opuene & Ekhator, 2021). The results imply that establishing more transparent and participatory governance structures could play a crucial role in reducing political instability and restoring trust among local stakeholders.

Consequently, the findings across the three research objectives consistently point to significant challenges posed by oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State. Environmental degradation, economic marginalization, and political unrest are interrelated issues that have compounded over time, adversely affecting the well-being of local communities. These results not only corroborate previous research (Afolabi & Adegboyega, 2020; Bassey & Etim, 2021; Ibe & Udo, 2022; Opuene & Ekhator, 2021) but also highlight the urgent need for policy interventions that address environmental cleanup, promote inclusive socio-economic development, and establish equitable governance mechanisms. Future efforts must prioritize a holistic approach that integrates environmental sustainability, economic empowerment, and improved governance to ensure that oil wealth translates into tangible benefits for the host communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study provides a comprehensive examination of the historical and political impact of oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. From the study, it was found that oil and gas operations have

profoundly affected the environment, socio-economic development, and political stability of host communities. On the environmental front, oil spills, gas flaring, and related degradation indicate that local communities perceive significant negative impacts on agriculture, fishing, air quality, and biodiversity. Socio-economically, stakeholders expressed considerable dissatisfaction regarding the limited contributions of oil companies toward infrastructural development and public service improvements. The increased unemployment rates further underscore a disconnect between national oil revenue and tangible local benefits. Politically, the findings indicated that oil operations have contributed to heightened tensions between the government and local communities. The perceived inequitable distribution of oil revenues and limited community engagement in decision-making have been associated with political unrest and instability. Thus, the study emphasizes the urgent need for integrated policy interventions that address environmental remediation, promote inclusive socio-economic development, and establish transparent governance structures. Such measures are critical to ensuring that the wealth generated from oil and gas operations contributes to the sustainable development and improved well-being of Bayelsa State's host communities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate the negative effects of oil and gas operations in Bayelsa State:

1. The government should enforce stricter environmental laws to hold oil companies accountable for oil spills, gas flaring, and other ecological damages.
2. Oil companies should invest in sustainable environmental remediation projects, including the cleanup of polluted water bodies, land restoration, and reforestation in affected areas.
3. Oil industries and the government should increase investment in local infrastructure, including roads, schools, and healthcare facilities, to ensure host communities benefit from oil revenues.
4. Oil companies should prioritize the employment and training of local youth to reduce unemployment and ensure that host communities benefit from resource extraction activities.
5. The government should implement transparent mechanisms for the equitable distribution of oil revenue to host communities, ensuring that funds are utilized for sustainable development projects.
6. Oil companies and the government should engage host communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that their concerns and needs are adequately addressed.
7. A structured conflict resolution framework should be established to address grievances between oil companies, the government, and host communities to reduce political unrest.
8. The government and oil companies should support skill acquisition and entrepreneurship programs to reduce dependence on oil-related employment and foster economic diversification.
9. Independent regulatory bodies should be strengthened to monitor oil companies' compliance with environmental and social responsibility policies.
10. The government should review and implement new policies that promote sustainable oil and gas exploration while protecting the rights and livelihoods of host communities.

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