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# **Crude Oil Pipeline Vandalism And Human Security In Rivers State: Evidence From Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the effect of vandalized oil pipelines and properties of the Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC), now operating under Oando Plc, on human security in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area (ONELGA) of Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the persistent incidents of pipeline vandalism, illegal refining, and oil theft in the Niger Delta and their implications for community safety, livelihoods, and environmental sustainability. Specifically, the study investigated the extent to which damage to oil pipelines and associated infrastructure affected human security in terms of loss of lives, environmental degradation, economic disruption, and social instability. The study adopted a qualitative research design and relied primarily on secondary sources of data, including government reports, newspaper accounts, scholarly publications, and documented case incidents of pipeline explosions and oil theft within ONELGA. Data were analyzed using descriptive and interpretive methods. Findings revealed that vandalized pipelines and damaged oil infrastructure had significant negative consequences for human security in the area. The study found that pipeline explosions and illegal refining activities had resulted in fatalities, destruction of homes and farmlands, environmental pollution, and increased insecurity within affected communities. The findings further showed that economic hardship, youth unemployment, and perceived marginalization of host communities contributed to the persistence of pipeline vandalism. The study concluded that oil pipeline vandalism posed a serious threat to human security in ONELGA and required comprehensive interventions beyond conventional security measures. It recommended stronger community engagement, youth economic empowerment, modernization of oil infrastructure, and environmental remediation as critical strategies for addressing the problem and promoting sustainable development in the Niger Delta.

**Keywords:** Crude oil pipeline vandalism, environmental degradation, human security, illegal refining, oil theft.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Crude-oil pipeline vandalism refers to the deliberate destruction, tampering, or illegal tapping of petroleum pipelines, often leading to oil spills, fires, environmental degradation, and loss of human lives. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, pipeline vandalism has become one of the most persistent threats to oil production and environmental sustainability. Between 2014 and 2024, the operations of the Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC), recently acquired by Oando Plc, have been repeatedly disrupted by pipeline breaches, crude-oil theft, and environmental contamination across Rivers State. The Niger Delta region has long been characterised by militancy, artisanal refining, and oil theft networks that utilise pipeline sabotage both as a political protest and as a means of illicit economic survival (Nwajiaku-Dahou & Ukeje,

2020). Despite several government initiatives including joint military task forces, pipeline surveillance contracts, and alternative livelihood programmes, pipeline vandalism continues to undermine oil production and environmental governance in the region (Rivers State Government, 2020; Amnesty International, 2023).

The economic implications of pipeline vandalism for Nigeria and Rivers State are severe. According to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), Nigeria has consistently lost between 150,000 and 200,000 barrels of crude oil daily due to theft and pipeline vandalism, translating into billions of dollars in annual revenue losses (NNPC, 2021; NNPCL, 2024). Reports further indicate that oil theft cost Nigeria approximately ₦2.1 trillion in 2021 alone, while substantial funds are continually expended on pipeline surveillance and repair operations (Dataphyte, 2021). Between 2019 and 2021, NNPC reportedly spent over ₦135 billion on pipeline security and maintenance, illustrating how public resources that could otherwise support development projects are diverted toward combating sabotage (Dataphyte, 2021). For operators such as NAOC/Oando operating in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area (ONELGA), these disruptions translate into production shutdowns, operational uncertainties, and increased security costs.

Pipeline vandalism in ONELGA has intensified in recent years. In November 2023, a gas pipeline rupture linked to NAOC infrastructure near Omoku triggered mass displacement and environmental concerns among surrounding communities. Reports indicated that ageing pipeline infrastructure some dating back to the 1960s may have contributed to the incident (The Guardian, 2023). Shortly afterward, in December 2023, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) attributed a major fire outbreak in Rivers State to vandalism along NAOC pipelines associated with illegal oil refining activities (ThisDay, 2023). These incidents highlight the vulnerability of petroleum infrastructure in the Niger Delta and the growing complexity of sabotage networks involving artisanal refiners, criminal syndicates, and unemployed youths.

Beyond economic losses, pipeline vandalism has devastating environmental consequences. Oil spills contaminate rivers, forests, and agricultural land, destroying ecosystems and undermining traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming. The Niger Delta has recorded thousands of oil spill incidents over the past decades, many linked to sabotage and pipeline damage (UNEP, 2020; Amnesty International, 2023). For instance, the Shell Petroleum Development Company reported dozens of pipeline breaches in 2022 caused largely by sabotage, resulting in significant oil discharge into the environment (Independent, 2023). Toxic petroleum pollutants released into the air, water, and soil expose communities to serious health risks, including respiratory diseases, cancers, and long-term ecological damage (Akpomuvie, 2021; UNEP, 2020). Consequently, environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is not merely an ecological issue but also a human security challenge affecting livelihoods, health, and social stability.

Pipeline vandalism also poses significant threats to human life and community safety. Explosions associated with illegal refining and pipeline breaches have resulted in numerous fatalities across the Niger Delta. In 2023, a refinery-related explosion in Rivers State reportedly killed several individuals engaged in illegal refining activities, demonstrating the lethal consequences of pipeline sabotage (AP News, 2023). Similar incidents have displaced residents, destroyed homes, and triggered widespread fear in affected communities (Egobueze, 2022). During the Omoku pipeline rupture in 2023, residents fled their homes in panic due to fears of further explosions and toxic contamination (The Guardian, 2023). These repeated crises undermine community stability and deepen public frustration with both government authorities and oil companies operating in the region.

Despite these alarming developments, government responses have largely remained reactive rather than preventive. Security agencies such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps have intensified surveillance and destroyed numerous illegal refining sites; however, pipeline vandalism continues to recur (Security Focus Africa, 2023). Scholars like Egobueze et al (2024) and Wilcox et al (2022) argued that the persistence of pipeline sabotage reflects deeper structural challenges, including youth unemployment, poverty, weak regulatory enforcement, corruption, and longstanding grievances between host communities and multinational oil companies (Akpomuvie, 2021; Nwajiaku-Dahou & Ukeje, 2020).

Additionally, ageing oil infrastructure across the Niger Delta has increased the vulnerability of pipelines to breaches and mechanical failures. The declaration of emergency security measures in parts of Rivers State in 2025 reflects growing recognition of the scale of the crisis (Reuters, 2025). Nevertheless, security-centred approaches alone cannot resolve the underlying socio-economic drivers of vandalism.

At the community level, distrust toward oil companies further complicates effective responses. Prior to its acquisition by Oando Plc, NAOC implemented various corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes in ONELGA; however, persistent allegations of environmental neglect, inadequate compensation for oil spills, and limited community participation in decision-making processes continue to fuel resentment among host communities (Amnesty International, 2023; The Guardian, 2023). For Oando to achieve sustainable operations in the region, a more inclusive development strategy is required, one that prioritises youth employment, transparent community engagement, environmental remediation, and collaborative governance alongside conventional security measures.

Given these realities, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between pipeline vandalism and human security in ONELGA. Specifically, the study is guided by the following research question:

**What is the level of the effect that vandalized oil pipelines and properties of Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd have on human security in ONELGA, Rivers State?**

In conclusion, crude-oil pipeline vandalism in ONELGA between 2014 and 2024 illustrates the complex intersection of economic loss, environmental degradation, and human insecurity in the Niger Delta. The enormous revenue losses suffered by both the Nigerian state and oil companies undermine national development, while ecological damage erodes the livelihoods of host communities dependent on farming and fishing. Moreover, explosions, displacements, and health hazards demonstrate that pipeline vandalism constitutes not merely an economic challenge but a profound human security crisis. Addressing the problem requires a comprehensive approach that strengthens governance institutions, replaces obsolete infrastructure, promotes community development, and builds genuine partnerships between oil companies, government agencies, and host communities. Only through such integrated strategies can Rivers State and the wider Niger Delta break the persistent cycle of pipeline vandalism and its devastating consequences.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The Resource Curse Theory, often described as the “paradox of plenty,” explains the paradoxical situation in which countries endowed with abundant natural resources often experience slower economic growth, weak institutional development, and higher levels of conflict compared to resource-poor countries. Contrary to the expectation that natural resource wealth should stimulate development, several studies demonstrate that resource-rich states frequently encounter governance challenges, corruption, and economic distortions (Auty, 1993; Sachs & Warner, 1995). The term resource curse was formally introduced by Auty (1993) to describe the developmental difficulties faced by resource-abundant economies. Empirical research by Sachs and Warner (1995) further established a strong negative relationship between natural resource dependence and long-term economic growth across several countries.

Scholars have identified multiple mechanisms through which natural resource abundance may hinder development. One widely discussed explanation is Dutch Disease, which occurs when a resource boom leads to currency appreciation, making other sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing less competitive in international markets (Corden & Neary, 1982). As capital and labour shift toward the extractive sector, economic diversification declines, leaving the economy highly vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations. Empirical studies across oil-exporting countries show that excessive dependence on oil revenues often discourages industrial development and undermines sustainable economic growth (Ross, 2012).

Another key dimension of the Resource Curse Theory concerns rent-seeking behaviour and weak institutional structures. Resource wealth generates large economic rents that are often captured by political elites, thereby encouraging corruption, patronage politics, and poor governance (Karl, 1997; Ross, 2001). In such contexts, governments rely heavily on resource revenues rather than taxation,

reducing incentives for accountability and democratic responsiveness. This phenomenon is commonly described as the rentier state effect, where political elites maintain control over resource revenues while neglecting broader economic development and institutional strengthening.

The theory also incorporates the conflict hypothesis, which suggests that resource abundance may increase the likelihood of violent conflict, particularly in countries with weak governance systems. According to Collier and Hoeffler (2004), valuable natural resources can finance rebel groups and prolong civil conflicts. Empirical evidence from several African countries demonstrates that resource-rich regions often experience greater political instability and violence compared to resource-poor areas (Le Billon, 2012). In Nigeria, the Niger Delta provides a clear example of this dynamic, where oil wealth has been associated with militancy, environmental degradation, and conflicts between host communities, oil companies, and the state (Obi, 2010; Watts, 2004).

Recent empirical studies further highlight the link between resource exploitation and insecurity in Nigeria. Research shows that oil theft, illegal refining, and pipeline vandalism have significantly contributed to environmental degradation, economic losses, and social instability in the Niger Delta region (Onuoha, 2016; Nwajiaku-Dahou & Ukeje, 2020). These activities have undermined human security by destroying livelihoods, contaminating water sources, and increasing violent confrontations between security agencies and local communities. Similarly, empirical findings by Wilcox, Egobueze, and Ogele (2022) demonstrate that crude-oil pipeline vandalism has significant implications for human security in Rivers State, including loss of lives, environmental pollution, and disruption of socio-economic activities.

Despite its widespread acceptance, the Resource Curse Theory has also faced criticism. Some scholars argue that resource abundance does not inevitably lead to negative developmental outcomes. Instead, the impact of resource wealth largely depends on the quality of governance and institutional management. For instance, Brunnschweiler and Bulte (2008) argue that the so-called resource curse is often associated with weak institutions rather than resource abundance itself. Similarly, Havranek, Horvath, and Zeynalov (2016), through a meta-analysis of several empirical studies, conclude that the negative relationship between resource wealth and economic growth is not universal and varies across countries depending on institutional quality and economic policy frameworks.

The relevance of the Resource Curse Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how resource abundance can contribute to socio-economic instability and insecurity in oil-producing regions. In the Niger Delta, oil wealth has generated enormous revenue for the Nigerian state, yet many host communities continue to face poverty, environmental degradation, and limited development opportunities. These conditions have contributed to grievances over resource control and perceived marginalization, which often manifest in acts of pipeline vandalism and illegal oil refining (Obi, 2010). Such activities pose significant threats to human security, as they lead to environmental pollution, loss of livelihoods, violent conflicts, and health hazards in affected communities.

Therefore, the Resource Curse Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the structural relationship between natural resource exploitation, governance challenges, and human security threats in resource-rich regions. By applying this theoretical perspective, the study examines how oil pipeline vandalism in ONELGA reflects broader governance and developmental challenges associated with resource wealth in the Niger Delta.

### **EXAMINING THE LEVEL OF THE EFFECT THAT VANDALIZED OIL PIPELINES AND PROPERTIES OF NIGERIAN AGIP OIL COMPANY LTD HAVE ON HUMAN SECURITY IN ONELGA, RIVERS STATE?**

Oil pipeline vandalism and the destruction of oil infrastructure belonging to the Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC), now operating under Oando Plc, have had profound implications for human security in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area (ONELGA) of Rivers State. Human security, broadly defined, encompasses the protection of individuals and communities from threats to life, livelihoods, health, and environmental sustainability (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). In oil-producing communities such as ONELGA, vandalism of petroleum pipelines not only

damages physical infrastructure but also generates serious consequences for human safety, environmental quality, and economic stability. Empirical evidence from recent incidents indicates that the level of impact on human security is high and multidimensional, affecting personal security, environmental security, economic security, and community stability.

One of the most visible manifestations of the human security implications of pipeline vandalism in ONELGA is the loss of lives associated with explosions and illegal refining activities. A tragic incident occurred on 26 April 2025 in Omoku, ONELGA, where an explosion at an illegal petroleum storage facility led to the death of five individuals, four women and one man. Reports indicated that the victims were involved in the storage and handling of illegally refined petroleum products derived from stolen crude oil. The explosion was linked to condensate obtained from vandalized pipelines, illustrating how pipeline sabotage and crude oil theft can result in fatal accidents within local communities (The Guardian, 2025; Vanguard, 2025). Such incidents demonstrate the immediate human cost of pipeline vandalism, particularly for economically vulnerable individuals who participate in illegal refining as a survival strategy.

Similarly, another devastating incident occurred in December 2023, when a pipeline explosion in ONELGA reportedly killed about 30 persons suspected of engaging in oil bunkering activities. According to reports, the victims were collecting fuel from a vandalized pipeline when a spark ignited leaking petroleum, causing a massive explosion. The affected pipeline was reportedly old and poorly maintained, raising concerns about the vulnerability of aging oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta (Vanguard, 2023). This tragedy highlights how pipeline vandalism, combined with obsolete infrastructure, creates highly dangerous conditions that threaten human life in oil-producing communities.

Beyond fatalities, pipeline vandalism has severe implications for environmental security, which is a critical dimension of human security. Oil spills resulting from vandalized pipelines contaminate farmland, rivers, and forests, thereby destroying ecosystems that support rural livelihoods. Studies on the Niger Delta have consistently shown that oil spills have devastating consequences for agricultural production and fishing activities, which are the primary sources of income for many local residents (UNEP, 2011; Obi, 2010). When pipelines are vandalized, large quantities of crude oil are released into surrounding environments, leading to soil infertility, water pollution, and loss of biodiversity. In ONELGA, communities dependent on farming and fishing often experience declining crop yields and reduced fish stocks due to pollution caused by oil spills and illegal refining activities.

Environmental degradation also contributes to health insecurity among residents of affected communities. Exposure to petroleum pollutants can cause respiratory problems, skin diseases, and other long-term health complications. Toxic fumes released during illegal refining processes and pipeline fires further exacerbate these health risks. Research indicates that communities in oil-producing areas frequently suffer from environmental health hazards linked to oil spills and gas emissions (Akpomovie, 2011; UNEP, 2011). In ONELGA, frequent incidents of pipeline vandalism and illegal refining create a polluted environment that threatens the well-being of residents, particularly women and children who are often more vulnerable to environmental health risks.

Pipeline vandalism also undermines economic security by destroying property, farmland, and local infrastructure. Many residents of ONELGA rely on agriculture, fishing, and small-scale trade for their livelihoods. When oil spills contaminate farmland or when fires destroy homes and local infrastructure, the economic survival of families becomes severely threatened. For example, fires resulting from pipeline explosions can destroy houses, markets, and community facilities, forcing residents to abandon their homes and livelihoods. This disruption contributes to increased poverty and unemployment in affected communities.

Moreover, pipeline vandalism contributes to social instability and insecurity within host communities. The presence of illegal refining camps and oil bunkering networks often attracts criminal groups, creating environments characterised by violence, competition over stolen crude oil, and conflicts between rival groups. Security agencies frequently conduct raids to destroy illegal refining sites, which sometimes leads to confrontations between law enforcement and local residents. Scholars have noted that such dynamics

create cycles of insecurity and distrust between communities, oil companies, and government authorities in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2004; Onuoha, 2016).

The persistence of pipeline vandalism in ONELGA is also closely linked to socio-economic grievances and governance challenges. Many residents of oil-producing communities perceive that despite the enormous wealth generated from oil extraction, they receive limited benefits in terms of employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and environmental protection. This perceived marginalization has contributed to the emergence of militant activities, oil bunkering, and illegal refining across the Niger Delta (Obi, 2010). Youth unemployment and poverty further encourage some individuals to engage in pipeline vandalism or illegal refining as a means of economic survival.

Empirical studies on oil pipeline vandalism in Rivers State reinforce the argument that these activities pose significant threats to human security. For example, Wilcox, Egobueze, and Ogele (2022) found that pipeline vandalism in Rivers State has resulted in environmental pollution, loss of lives, and disruption of socio-economic activities in host communities. Their study demonstrates that vandalized pipelines expose communities to severe environmental hazards and contribute to declining standards of living. Similarly, research on oil theft and insecurity in the Niger Delta shows that the destruction of oil infrastructure has contributed to economic losses, environmental degradation, and social conflict across the region (Nwajiaku-Dahou & Ukeje, 2020).

In summary, empirical evidence indicates that the level of the effect of vandalized pipelines and damaged oil properties belonging to NAOC/Oando on human security in ONELGA is significant and multifaceted. Pipeline vandalism leads to loss of life through explosions and fires, environmental degradation through oil spills, economic hardship through the destruction of livelihoods, and social instability through the growth of illegal oil networks. The recurring incidents in Omoku and other communities within ONELGA illustrate that pipeline vandalism is not merely an economic or infrastructural problem but a serious human security challenge affecting the safety, health, and livelihoods of local populations.

Addressing this problem requires a comprehensive approach that combines stronger pipeline surveillance, modernization of aging oil infrastructure, community development programmes, environmental remediation, and youth employment initiatives. Only through coordinated efforts involving government agencies, oil companies, and host communities can the devastating human security consequences of pipeline vandalism in ONELGA be effectively mitigated.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings from this study indicate that vandalism of oil pipelines and properties belonging to the Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd (NAOC), now operating under Oando Plc, poses a significant threat to human security in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area (ONELGA), Rivers State. Evidence from recent incidents in Omoku and other communities demonstrates that pipeline vandalism results in loss of lives, environmental degradation, destruction of livelihoods, and disruption of community stability. Explosions associated with illegal refining and oil theft have repeatedly caused fatalities and injuries, while oil spills from damaged pipelines have polluted farmlands and water sources. These developments not only undermine economic activities such as farming and fishing but also expose residents to serious health risks.

The persistence of pipeline vandalism in ONELGA reflects deeper structural challenges, including youth unemployment, poverty, weak infrastructure, environmental neglect, and limited community participation in resource governance. When host communities perceive that they are excluded from the benefits of oil extraction or that their environment is continually degraded without adequate remediation, resentment may increase, thereby encouraging acts of sabotage and illegal refining. Consequently, addressing pipeline vandalism requires more than security enforcement alone; it demands comprehensive strategies that tackle the underlying socio-economic and governance issues associated with resource exploitation in the Niger Delta.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Community Engagement and Inclusion:** Oil companies such as Nigerian Agip Oil Company Ltd, in partnership with government agencies, should actively engage host communities in decision-

making processes related to resource management, employment opportunities, and local development initiatives. Establishing inclusive dialogue platforms, community development committees, and participatory planning mechanisms will foster trust between oil companies and local residents. Inclusive participation will reduce feelings of marginalization, strengthen community ownership of development projects, and discourage acts of pipeline vandalism and sabotage.

2. **Youth Employment and Economic Empowerment:** Government agencies and oil companies should implement sustainable youth employment and skills acquisition programmes within host communities. Many youths engage in illegal refining and pipeline vandalism due to unemployment and lack of viable economic opportunities. Vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and local content employment schemes in the oil and gas sector can provide alternative livelihoods and reduce the economic incentives for engaging in destructive activities.
3. **Modernization and Protection of Oil Infrastructure:** Oil companies should invest in the modernization of aging pipelines and the deployment of advanced surveillance technologies to monitor oil infrastructure. Many pipelines in the Niger Delta were installed decades ago and are highly vulnerable to corrosion and sabotage. The use of modern leak detection systems, drone surveillance, and real-time monitoring technologies will improve pipeline security and reduce the frequency of oil spills and explosions associated with vandalism.
4. **Environmental Remediation and Sustainable Development:** Government and oil companies should prioritize environmental cleanup, remediation of polluted lands, and sustainable development initiatives in affected communities. Restoring degraded ecosystems, supporting agricultural recovery programmes, and providing access to clean water will help rebuild livelihoods and improve the overall well-being of residents. Visible environmental restoration efforts can also help rebuild trust between oil companies and host communities.

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