

FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENTS TO NON- STATE ARMED GROUPS (NSAGS): SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL (IN)JUSTICE AND UNREST IN THE OIL-PRODUCING REGION OF NIGERIA

Talabi Rasheed Ayegbusi
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
Federal University Oye Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
ayegbusi76@gmail.com / talabi.ayegbusi@fuoye.edu.ng

Abstract

This study investigates the social and environmental injustice nexus as a significant factor contributing to the unrest in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta region. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, it draws on frustration-aggression theory, deprivation theory, and structural strain theory to understand the transformation of social movements into armed militant groups. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of the environmental and social (in)justice dimensions of the conflict in the Niger Delta region. Previous studies have often been limited in scope and have failed to adequately account for the complexity of the conflict, resulting in sectional arguments being presented as causal factors. By contrast, this study draws on theories from psychology and sociology to examine the connection between social and environmental (in)justice and the transformation of social movements into armed militancy groups. Utilizing secondary data, including reports and documents from government and non-governmental organizations, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the root causes of the conflict in the Niger Delta and to identify enduring peacebuilding strategies that can contribute to a sustainable resolution of the conflict.

Key Word: Armed Militant Groups, Oil-Producing, Socio-environmental, Social Movement Unrest

Introduction

Nigeria's oil-producing regions endure significant unfairness on at least two levels. First, the oil industry has caused extensive environmental degradation and pollution, severely impacting the health and socio-economic well-being of local communities (Briggs, 2022). Second, since oil was discovered in Nigeria, the distribution of financial benefits to oil-producing states has been contentious. The communities that produce the oil often do not receive a fair share of the revenues (Abejide, 2022). This perceived inequity and lack of opportunities have fueled frustration and unrest in the region.

Several studies have examined the socio-political impacts of militancy (Dialoke and Edeja, 2017; Ogbone, 2019; Paki and Ebienfa, 2011), while others have explored the human rights dimensions of the crises (Onwuazombe, 2017; Umukoro, 2018). However, there has been limited focus on the environmental and social justice aspects of the conflict. Even studies that consider these perspectives (Glazebrook and Kola-Olusanya, 2011; Ogwu, 2012; Okuyade, 2011; Roberts, 2021) often lack comprehensive scope, failing to capture the full complexity of the conflict and sometimes promoting sectional arguments as causal factors.

This study aims to investigate the nexus between social and environmental injustices and the transformation of social movements into armed militant groups in the Niger Delta region. It seeks to answer two key questions: What factors are responsible for the transformation of major social

movements into armed militant groups in the Niger Delta? And what is the connection between environmental and social injustice and the unrest in the region? Addressing these questions is crucial for broadening the narrative and discourse on peace and conflict studies in Africa, particularly Nigeria.

The study provides a broad overview of the complex relationship between social movements and non-state armed groups (NSAGs), offering insights into their interplay, potential overlaps, and divergences. It also explores how these entities emerge or coexist in the context of socio-environmental (in)justice in an oil-producing region. By employing an interdisciplinary approach, the study contributes to the discourse on the intersection of social movements and NSAGs.

The study is organized into several sections. Following this introduction is the conceptual frame of reference, which explains the variables in the study and their interrelationships. Next, the theoretical frameworks upon which the study is grounded are presented. The third section examines the socio-environmental injustices in Nigeria's oil-producing region, their causes, and their impacts. The fourth section provides an in-depth understanding of the factors that shape the evolution and formation of social movements in response to socio-environmental injustices. The fifth section explores the rise of armed militant groups and their adoption of violence to address widespread social and environmental injustices. The final section summarizes the key issues and offers potential policy options.

Conceptual Frame of Reference

This study's conceptual framework comprises three key concepts: social movements, non-state armed groups, and socio-environmental (in)justice. Since its inception in the 1970s, social movement studies have undergone various conceptual phases, often driven by differences in opinion and discourse. Although defining a social movement can be challenging—either because it might be too broad to encompass all forms of collective action or too narrow to exclude some forms—certain characteristics can be highlighted to provide a clearer understanding. Edward (2014:4-5), for instance, offered four conceptual distinctions.

- (a) Social movements are collective, organized efforts at social change rather than individual efforts at social change. (b) [They] exist over a period of time by engaging in a conflictual issue with a powerful opponent, rather than being one off events. (c) The members ... are not just working together but share a collective identity. (d) They actively pursue change by employing protest.

According to conventional definitions used by academics, an armed group is "an armed, non-state actor in contemporary wars... [with] a minimal degree of cohesiveness as an organization (to be distinguished as an entity and to have a name, to have some kind of leadership) and a certain duration of its violent campaign" (Malthaner, 2007:11-12). In general terms, "non-state armed groups" refer to distinct organizations that are (i) willing and able to use violence to achieve their goals and (ii) not a part of the regular armed forces, presidential guards, police, or special forces, which are formalized state institutions. As a result, they (iii) enjoy some degree of independence in politics, military operations, resources, and infrastructure. However, they might receive covert or overt support from, or be used as a tool by, state actors, as is frequently the case with militias, paramilitaries, mercenaries, and private military firms (Hofmann and Schneckenner, 2011).

In this context, "socioenvironmental (in)justice" is used as a catch-all phrase to refer to both social (in)justice and environmental (in)justice. The four key concepts examined here—social movements, non-state armed groups, and socioenvironmental (in)justice—are essential to contextualize and operationalize their meanings.

Social injustice is the gap between what is and what should be. It occurs when actions violate a person's or group's rights, marginalize their opportunities, or mistreat them. Simply put, social injustice refers to the denial or infringement of specific populations' or groups' economic, sociocultural, political, civil, or human rights based on how those in positions of higher authority or

influence perceive those populations or groups to be inferior (Levy and Sidel, 2006). In this study, "environmental injustice" refers to any unjust or unfair imposition of environmental harm on innocent third parties not directly associated with the business or market operation causing such harm. It also includes not involving minority communities in policy choices about the unfavorable environmental effects of industrial activities that pose potential hazards to their living, health, and well-being (Adeola, 2017; Adeola, 2009).

The preceding analysis suggests that socioenvironmental (in)justice, or the uneven distribution of environmental burdens and benefits among various socio-economic groups, can give rise to social movements and NSAGs. Although both have similar concerns about social injustice and environmental deterioration, their strategies and tactics differ. Social movements advocate for policy reforms and rely on peaceful measures, whereas NSAGs employ violence and sabotage to further their goals. Social movements and NSAGs occasionally collaborate, coexist, or transform within the same social and political milieu. While social movements strive to bring about positive social change, some have become linked to militancy, extremist activity, destruction, and loss of life. This transformation often involves a complex procedure compelled by communities that feel marginalized, neglected, and dominated by the state or the dominant sector within society that possesses authority and power, disregarding peaceful means of expressing and asserting their rights.

Overall, the interplay between social movements, NSAGs, and socioenvironmental (in)justice is determined by various factors, including political opportunity structures, resource mobilization, and environmental justice concerns. Understanding the dynamics of social and political challenges in Nigeria's oil-producing region and other parts of the world facing similar challenges requires grasping the complex interplay between these actors and issues. To provide a more comprehensive structure for exploring the reality of Nigeria's oil-producing region, the subsequent section probes the theoretical and empirical literature on social movements, NSAGs, and socioenvironmental (in)justice.

From Social Movements to Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs): Theory and Evidence

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the study will be grounded on the following theoretical frameworks: Relative Deprivation Theory and Frustration-Aggression Theory.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Samuel Stouffer pioneered the Relative Deprivation Theory in his study of military officials during World War II. However, scholars like Robert Merton and Walter Runciman have extended it further. Relative deprivation is a psychological state in which a person feels unfairly disadvantaged compared to others or their past experiences because they lack something others have but would like to have (Smith et al., 2012). Relative deprivation is widely perceived as the theory behind social movements (Gurney and Tierney, 1982). According to social and political scientists, the Relative Deprivation Theory holds that people who believe they are being deprived of something essential to their lives (e.g., money, rights, political voice, status) may organize or join social movements or armed conflicts to obtain the things they believe they are deprived of (Longley, 2021). Relative deprivation theorists contend that political unrest and its outcomes, such as protest, instability, violence, and revolution, depend not solely on the overall state of the economy but also on how wealth is distributed (Nagel, 1974). Thus, the Relative Deprivation Theory is suitable for explaining the development of various social movements in the Nigerian oil-producing region and their various activities against the Nigerian government and the international oil corporations due to deprivation.

Frustration-Aggression Theory

The Frustration-Aggression Theory has long been used to explain conflict and violence. It was developed by John Dollard and his colleagues in the late 1930s. It stated that "the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression" (Dollard et al., 1939, p. 1). Taken literally, it implies that there must be some form of initial frustration before aggression occurs, and the

argument that frustration "always leads to some form of aggression" means that any frustration will inevitably result in aggression. In a 1941 article by the same authors, they somewhat qualified these predetermined generalizations by stating that "frustration produces instigation to aggression, but this is not the only type of instigation that it may produce" (Miller, Sears, Mowrer, Doob, & Dollard, 1941, p. 339). According to Berkowitz (1968), who reviewed the research on and with the frustration-aggression hypothesis, it has been the subject of numerous critiques, qualifications, and suggestions for improvement. This idea eventually led Berkowitz (1989) to reformulate the most often cited hypothesis in recent and current studies on the causes and effects of frustration, especially its role in the underlying cause of aggression.

The central tenet of the Frustration-Aggression Theory is that obstruction or blockage of an actor's (or actors') attempt to achieve a goal sets off the aggressive instinct, which prompts the urge to act aggressively against and harm the obstruction that caused the frustration (Akahalu, 2014). This accurately depicts the state of affairs in the oil-producing region of Nigeria.

Socio-environmental Injustice in Nigeria's Oil-Producing Region

The oil-producing region of Nigeria has faced substantial socio-economic and environmental challenges due to multinational firms' exploration and production of oil. This section examines the socioenvironmental injustices in the country's oil-producing region and explores their causes and impacts.

Economic Marginalization

The Nigerian economy largely depends on the crude oil produced in the country's oil-producing region. Given this, it would seem reasonable to assume that the local indigenous peoples would be treated with the utmost respect, equity, and fairness, in addition to being protected by the oil industry's stakeholders, particularly the government of Nigeria. Regrettably, this has not been the case over time. Instead of fairness and justice, the region's inhabitants are subjected to at least two levels of injustice: social and environmental (Okonkwo and Etemire, 2017). The socio-economic well-being of the population of the oil-producing region has been negatively impacted by this condition, especially in terms of their means of survival. Despite the enormous scale of crude oil and petrochemical extraction activities in the region, there is a severe underdevelopment, evidenced by the lack of essential infrastructures like good roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, hospitals, and schools (Obiam and Amadi, 2022).

Environmental Degradation

Before commercial oil production began, Nigeria's oil-producing region was largely an unpolluted environment providing rich natural resources for the indigenous residents. The 36,000 square kilometers of marshland, creeks, tributaries, and lagoons that make up the wetland area are extremely rich in wildlife and fish resources, have a high level of biodiversity, and contain several rare species of both animals and plants. With the government's culpability and the absence of a sustainable and efficient solution, the petroleum industry has become a source of enormous pollution and environmental degradation in the region (Agbu, 2005). Ironically, oil exploration activities have become the main driver of regional underdevelopment and environmental deterioration since they began in Oloibiri town in the Niger Delta in 1956 (Omotola, 2006). Among other things, these activities have led to massive oil spills and extensive gas flaring, which have severely damaged water bodies and forests, caused severe land pollution and biodiversity loss, incessant noise pollution (from seismographic explosions that compromise the structural integrity of buildings, roads, and other physical structures) as well as light pollution (caused by gas flaring), in addition to the high frequency of acid rain caused by air pollution in the region (Aaron, 2006).

Health Impacts

According to a UN assessment, riverine people in the Niger Delta region are exposed to polluted air, water, and food, posing health risks and reducing life expectancy (Ann, 2022). Indicators of

household environmental health in the area are poor, with deficiencies in areas such as sanitization, access to clean water, and healthcare services (Pona et al., 2021). Further aggravating factors include oil spills caused by pipeline corrosion, poor infrastructure maintenance, and deliberate vandalism. This condition has exposed hundreds of thousands of people in the Niger Delta to oil poisoning, which has had devastating health consequences (Biewendt, 2020). Further worsening the already severe local and regional health issues is gas flaring during oil mining (Giwa et al., 2019). Burning the gas from oil wells – gas flaring – is an everyday occurrence in Nigeria's oil-producing region. Gas flaring is an economically wasteful and environmentally damaging process made possible by lax regulations and insufficient environmental monitoring (Alimi and Gibson, 2022). Relying on infant health data from Demographic Health Surveys and satellite-detected data on gas flaring to explore the impact of flaring on disease occurrence and child mortality in Nigeria's oil-producing regions, Alimi and Gibson (2022) find a significant positive correlation between gas flaring and the occurrence of respiratory ailments and fever among children under the age of five.

Displacement and Relocation

Displacement and relocation epitomize the stark socioenvironmental injustices pervasive in Nigeria's oil-producing region. The environmental toll of oil spills, gas flaring, and air pollution has compelled thousands to abandon their ancestral lands, profoundly affecting traditional livelihoods and ways of life (Ukhurebor, 2021). Forced from their homes, communities often find themselves resettled in camps far from their original residences, lacking basic amenities like clean water and healthcare (Iheme and Keraminiyage, 2019). This unlawful displacement has inflicted severe social and economic hardships on the affected populations, severing ties to their heritage and community cohesion, thereby exacerbating mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Nkem et al., 2022). Moreover, the unsuitability of new lands often means displaced individuals can no longer sustain traditional livelihoods like farming and fishing, leading to increased poverty and food insecurity (Agbonifo, 2022).

Nigeria's oil-producing region grapples with significant socioenvironmental challenges that deeply impact residents' quality of life and economic stability. The detrimental effects of oil production, coupled with forced displacement, underscore the urgent need for sustainable solutions and inclusive governance to mitigate these ongoing injustices.

Social Movements and Peaceful Resistance in the Oil-Producing Region

The oil-producing regions of Nigeria have long endured profound socioenvironmental injustices stemming from oil exploration and production. These injustices have galvanized social movements committed to raising awareness, demanding accountability from multinational corporations and the Nigerian government, and challenging the status quo. Through non-violent protests and advocacy campaigns, these movements have sought to address and rectify these systemic injustices. This section examines their strategies and assesses the efficacy of peaceful resistance in achieving social and environmental justice.

Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) emerged prominently in the 1990s, yet its origins can be traced back to the colonial era. During colonial rule, the Ogoni people actively resisted colonization and fought for civil, economic, and political rights. Their struggle evolved to encompass environmental justice, particularly under Ken Saro-Wiwa's leadership, culminating in the 1990 introduction of the Ogoni Bill of Rights. This document became a pivotal manifesto, advocating for Ogoni people's rights through peaceful dialogue and negotiation (Neocosmos, 2011).

Government Repression and Violent Responses

Unfortunately, the Nigerian state has often responded to these movements with repression. Successive military regimes employed forceful measures, including the deployment of military and paramilitary forces like the notorious "kill-and-go" mobile police, to quell dissent in the Niger Delta. Tragic

incidents such as the 1990 Umuechem massacre, where protesters against Shell's practices were violently suppressed, highlight the severe repercussions faced by those advocating for change (Amugo and Chinda, 2019).

In early 1993, widespread protests by the Ogoni people were met with brutal military crackdowns, culminating in the unjust trial and execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders in 1995. Despite international condemnation and Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth, these events underscore the state's readiness to use extreme measures to silence dissent (Paterson, 2023; Lynch, Fegadel, and Long, 2021).

Emergence of New Movements and Shifts to Violent Tactics

Many ethnic minority resistance movements emerged in the Niger Delta following the execution of the Ogoni Nine. Among these were the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Movement for Ogbia Reparation (MORETO), the Chikoko Movement, the Oron National Forum, the Egi Peoples Coalition, the Ikwere Youth Convention, and the Ijaw Youth Council. MOSOP's non-violent approach was a model for these movements, recognizing the effectiveness and moral legitimacy of peaceful resistance. But when the scale of socio-environmental injustice worsened, and efforts at peaceful resolution appeared unsuccessful, some communities were driven to turn to violent tactics to bring the government and oil companies' attention to their situation (Courson, 2009; Okonkwo and Etemire, 2017).

The oil-producing region of Nigeria has witnessed substantial socio-environmental injustice, prompting the emergence of various social movements advocating for change. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) stands out as a significant example of peaceful resistance. However, despite the dedication to non-violence, the Nigerian government's repressive responses have often escalated conflicts. This has led to a shift in some movements towards violent tactics as a means of drawing attention to their plight. The complex dynamics between peaceful and violent resistance highlight the ongoing struggle for socio-environmental justice in Nigeria's oil-producing region.

Armed Militant Groups and Violent Resistance in Oil-Producing Region of Nigeria

Due to the unabated socio-environmental injustices in Nigeria's oil-producing regions, the failure of peaceful approaches to effect change resulted in the emergence of armed militant groups. While social movements and non-violent activism, like the Ogoni Social Movement, had initially advocated peaceful means to address grievances, the continued disregard by the government and oil companies for the plight of communities forced some groups to turn to more extreme measures. This section explores the rise of armed militant groups, their adoption of violence to address widespread social and environmental injustices, their tactics, and the impacts of their actions on the Niger Delta region.

Rise of Armed Militant Groups

The struggle for socio-environmental justice and the development of the oil-producing region began to assume a terrifying dimension in the 1990s as it rapidly became militarized. Although the Niger Delta made its first effort to break away from Nigeria in 1966 under the leadership of Major Isaac Boro, an Ijaw man, these separation moves had little to do with environmental injustice. They were in response to the colonial government's 1956 failure to establish an independent nation for the Niger Delta people (Omotola, 2006).

Social movements' earlier non-violent methods significantly changed, with an increasing number of armed militant groups and an alarming rise in violent resistance in Nigeria's oil-producing region. While the government and oil companies have responded in specific ways, their efforts have not been sufficient to effectively address the persistent problems of the Niger Delta community. Often, the responses have worsened the raging firestorm engulfing the region (Frynas, 2001). The failure of such measures can be seen in the growing militarization and radicalization of the conflict over resource

control and the significant increase in ethnic militias in the region competing with the state for control of the region's sole source of force (Jike, 2005).

Tactics and Impacts of Militant Groups

According to Courson (2009), the militarization of the Niger Delta region has left traces of "sorrow, tears, blood," pain, and death. The heavy toll in terms of human rights abuses in the region worsened matters. In some instances, oil-producing communities were leveled after oil firms informed the military that protesters were threatening oil infrastructure or personnel. The rising militarization of the region started to have an increasing effect on local resistance, with many changes from non-violent to violent confrontations. Among the new groups were the Movement for the Survival of Izon Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Atangbala Boys (TAB), Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Freedom Fighters (NDFF), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and the Egbesu Boys (Jike, 2005).

Government Response and Continued Unrest

As Nigeria transitioned from military dictatorship to democracy in 1999, unrest in the Niger Delta persisted. Initial hopes that the Niger Delta conflict could be settled democratically after the enthronement of democracy were dashed. Within a few years, such optimism was replaced by anger, frustration, and an upsurge in violence. President Olusegun Obasanjo's victory signaled the opening of the democratic space for Nigerians to participate in the country's governance. However, he sent more soldiers to several volatile areas in the Niger Delta during his first year in office. To be more explicit, Odi, an oil-producing village in Bayelsa State, was destroyed on 20 November 1999 by troops sent by the President, barely six months into the democratic regime. Some estimates put the death toll at around 2,483 people, mostly women and children (Alake, 2020).

To quell the unrest in the region, the federal government formally established a Joint Task Force (JTF) on 21 August 2003, consisting of the three military and security branches. This military campaign was code-named "Operation Restore Hope" (Albert, Danjibo, and Albert, 2020). Its mandate included, among other things, securing oil installations, quelling oil community unrest, and neutralizing any threat to the oil sector.

Escalation of Armed Resistance

Following the 2003 Nigerian elections, there was a post-election armed resistance battle in the Niger Delta due to a low-intensity armed conflict and the acquisition of advanced weapons and firearms. These militia groups' activities were ruthless. The availability of lethal firearms such as AK-47 rifles has exacerbated their savagery (Courson, 2009). For example, in September 2004, Asari Dokubo, the NDPVF's leader, openly said the group had 10,000 soldiers ready to retake the Niger Delta's resources. Similarly, a militia group, MEND, invited a journalist to their base, paraded able-bodied men well-trained in military tactics and fully armed, and claimed they were ready to go to war to redeem the Niger Delta's devastation caused by oil exploitation. These actions lend credence to Professor George J. Frynas's assertion that the Niger Delta has an abundance of firearms (Omotola, 2006).

Proliferation of Arms and Hostilities

The Niger Delta has grown into a hotbed for the proliferation of light arms and small weapons, which the militias have frequently used. There have been several instances of oil wells being completely seized, oil employees being kidnapped, and hostages being taken. It was a timely reminder of the significance of this volatile region for global oil supplies when the abduction of a group of Western oil employees in the Niger Delta in January 2006 led to a sudden increase in gas prices worldwide. A hitherto unknown group, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), claimed responsibility for the workers' hostage. A second round of kidnappings and many attacks on oil facilities swiftly provoked concern in the oil sector. Anxiety reached its highest point in mid-2008

when MEND claimed it orchestrated an attack on an offshore facility, Bonga, in an email to journalists (Asuni, 2009).

Although the exact number of people who engage in militant activities in the Niger Delta is unknown, a 2007 study carried out for the Delta State government provides some indication of the scope of the issue. Asuni (2009) claims that the number of armed group members in the Niger Delta may be as high as 60,000. However, it is important to note that the number of active militant groups in the region changes over time as some disband or merge.

The failure of peaceful approaches to effect change in Nigeria's oil-producing regions led to the emergence of armed militant groups. The socio-environmental injustices, combined with the government's and oil companies' continued disregard for the plight of local communities, drove some groups to adopt violent measures. The tactics and impacts of these armed militant groups have significantly affected the Niger Delta region, leading to increased instability, human rights abuses, and a complex and ongoing struggle for socio-environmental justice. Okonkwo and Etemire (2017:43) summarized the situation in the region more succinctly:

The government responded by militarizing the region. Strands of the region's agitation metamorphosed into militancy and insurgency of various shades, with differing goals and objectives ranging from nationalism and freedom fighting to outright criminality and terrorism. Hence, the Niger Delta become a hotbed for frequent protests, violent conflicts, and outright criminality, all serving to increase the plight of people therein.

In response to the rising violence and armed conflict in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government launched an amnesty program in 2009. The program's objective was to offer an opportunity for dialogue, disarmament, and reintegration of repentant militants into society (Davidheiser and Nyiayaana, 2011). To encourage the ex-militants to abandon violence and adopt peaceful means of engagement, it provided monetary incentives, vocational training, scholarship opportunities, and support for entrepreneurship (Nweke, 2022). The government's approach to the Niger Delta problem experienced a significant shift with the implementation of the amnesty program, which acknowledged the necessity for dialogue and reconciliation. It sought to provide the region with a foundation for long-term peace, stability, and development (Omadjohwoefe, 2011).

Although the program initially showed promise in reducing violence and promoting reintegration, numerous challenges have hampered its success and sustainability. Corruption, bribery, the substitution of documented beneficiaries with non-beneficiaries, late payment of allowances and stipends, and internal conflicts among militants undermined the policy. Another major concern has been the lack of accountability and transparency in managing the resources earmarked for the program. Reports of financial mismanagement and diversion have eroded the confidence and trust of the residents and the former militants (Wapmuk, 2012).

The inappropriate use of resources meant for rehabilitation and reintegration has left many people feeling abandoned and marginalized, resulting in feelings of injustice and a lack of confidence in the government's commitment to addressing their concerns. The ecosystem continues to suffer from oil spills, gas flare-ups, and other pollution, which harm residents' quality of life (Ikelegbe and Umukoro, 2016; Imoh, 2019).

Limited political inclusion and poor representation of Niger Delta communities in decision-making processes have added to frustrations and discontent. A sense of exclusion continues to exist, and the local communities' lack of meaningful engagement and participation in formulating policies and managing available resources drives the belief that peaceful methods for change are ineffective. These issues have led to a resurgence of armed militant groups (Ikelegbe and Umukoro, 2014).

Chukwudi and Victor (2021) noted that the Niger Delta Avengers was founded due to significant frustration over the Nigerian government's delay in providing prompt payment and attention to the demands of repentant militants in the Niger Delta region. The resurgence of armed groups has also

been inspired by the persistent environmental deterioration and the poor progress being made in resolving the ecological problems in the Niger Delta. Resentment and radicalization among the affected populace have been exacerbated by what is viewed as a lack of significant efforts to hold oil firms accountable for their actions and enforce environmental laws.

The amnesty program launched by the Nigerian government in 2009 aimed to foster dialogue, disarmament, and reintegration of militants, marking a significant shift towards reconciliation and long-term peace in the Niger Delta. However, the program's success has been undermined by corruption, mismanagement, and inadequate political inclusion, leading to continued environmental degradation and a resurgence of militant activities. Addressing these underlying issues remains crucial for achieving sustainable peace and development in the region.

Conclusion

It is clear that socioenvironmental injustices in Nigeria's oil-producing region have created a complex and volatile situation. While social movements have been pivotal in advocating for justice and raising awareness, the failure to address underlying issues has led to the rise of armed militant groups, exacerbating violence. Therefore, proactive measures from the Nigerian government, oil companies, and international stakeholders are essential to tackle the root causes of unrest and address the legitimate concerns of the Niger Delta communities.

Implementing environmentally sustainable policies, fostering dialogue, and ensuring equitable resource allocation are crucial steps towards achieving lasting peace, environmental stability, and social justice in the region. Engaging local communities, involving them in decision-making processes, and prioritizing their well-being over short-term profits are paramount. Only through holistic and inclusive strategies can the cycle of socioenvironmental injustice and unrest be broken, paving the way for a fair and prosperous future for all stakeholders in Nigeria's oil-producing region.

References

- Aaron, K. K. (2006). Human rights violation and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. *Activating Human Rights, Peter Long, Oxford, Borne, New York*, 193-215.
- Adeola, F. O. (2017). Cross-national environmental injustice and human rights issues: A review of evidence in the developing world. *Transnational Environmental Crime*, 141-162.
- Agbonifo, P. E. (2022). Socio-economic implications of poor environmental management: a framework on the Niger Delta questions. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 24(2), 2453-2470.
- Agbu, O., "Oil and Environmental Conflicts," in Saliu, Hassan A. (ed.), *Nigeria Under Democratic Rule, 1999-2003*, Vol. 2, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2005, pp.81-82.
- Akahalu, U. A. (2014). *Interrogating frustration-aggression from environmental degradation in The Niger Delta conflict*. Nottingham Trent University (United Kingdom).
- Alake, M. (2020). Here are 5 of the most grueling massacres by members of the armed Nigerian security personnel. Available at <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/see-5-of-the-most-grueling-massacres-in-the-history-of-nigeria/pr57nx8>. Retrieved on 9 June 2023.
- Albert, I. O., Danjibo, N., & Albert, O. (2020). Back to the past: Evolution of kidnapping and hostage-taking in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Beijing L. Rev.*, 11, 211.
- Alimi, O. B., & Gibson, J. (2022). The Impact of Gas Flaring on Child Health in Nigeria.
- Amugo, F. and Chinda, I. (2019). Ethnic Nationalities Struggles in Nigeria: The Case of Ogoniland and MOSOP. *Port Harcourt Journal of History & Diplomatic Studies* 3(1), 271-287.
- Ann, G. (2022). 11 years after UNEP report, Rivers communities still endangered by pollution. Available at <https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/11-years-after-unep-report-rivers-communities-still-endangered-by-pollution/>. Accessed on 9 May 2023.
- Asuni, J. B. (2009). *Understanding the armed groups of the Niger Delta* (pp. 1-27). New York: Council on Foreign Relations.

- Berkowitz, L. (1968). The study of urban violence: Some implications of laboratory studies of frustration and aggression. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 11(4), 14–17. doi:10.1177/000276426801100405
- Biewendt, M. (2020). Sustainable Development: A Quantitative Analysis Regarding the Impact of Resource Rents on State Welfare from 2002 to 2017. *Socioeconomic Challenges*, 4(4), 119-131. [https://doi.org/10.21272/sec.4\(4\).119-131.2020](https://doi.org/10.21272/sec.4(4).119-131.2020)
- Corby, E. (2016). Ogoni people struggle with Shell Oil, Nigeria, 1990-1995. *Global Non-violent Action Database [Online]* <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/ogoni-people-struggle-shell-oil-nigeria-1990-1995>. Accessed, 28.
- Courson, E. (2009). *Movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND): Political marginalization, repression and petro-insurgency in the Niger Delta*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Davidheiser, M., & Nyiayaana, K. (2011). Demobilization or remobilization? The amnesty program and the search for peace in the Niger Delta. *African Security*, 4(1), 44-64.
- Dollard, J., Miller, N. E., Doob, L. W., Mowrer, O. H., and Sears, R. R. (1939). Psychological principles: I.
- Frynas, J. G. (2001). Corporate and state responses to anti- oil protests in the Niger Delta. *African Affairs*, 100(398), 27-54.
- Giwa, S. O., Nwaokocha, C. N., Kuye, S. I., & Adama, K. O. (2019). Gas flaring attendant impacts of criteria and particulate pollutants: A case of Niger Delta region of Nigeria. *Journal of King Saud University - Engineering Sciences*, 31(3), 209-217. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jksues.2017.04.003>
- Gurney, J. N., & Tierney, K. J. (1982). Relative deprivation and social movements: A critical look at twenty years of theory and research. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 23(1), 33-47.
- Hofmann, C., & Schneckener, U. (2011). Engaging non-state armed actors in state-and peace-building: options and strategies. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 93(883), 603-621.
- Iheme, M., and Keraminiyage, K. (2019). OIL AND GAS INDUCED DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENTS IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA. In *14th INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2019: Contemporary and Future Directions in the Built Environment* (p. 558).
- Ikelegbe, A., and Umukoro, N. (2014). *Exclusion and the challenges of peace-building in the Niger Delta: An assessment of the amnesty programme*. Benin City: Centre for Population and Environmental Development.
- Ikelegbe, A., and Umukoro, N. (2016). The Amnesty Programme and the Resolution of the Niger Delta Crisis: Progress, Challenges, and Prognosis. CPED Monograph Series No. 14.
- Imoh, C. E. (2019). Reconciliation: The Missing Link in The Niger Delta Amnesty Programme. *Peace and conflict resolution in Africa: Lessons and opportunities*, 163.
- Jike, V.T., (2005) "The Political Sociology of Resource Control in the Niger Delta", in Saliu, Hassan, A. (ed.). (2005). *Nigeria under Democratic Rule, 1999-2003*, Vol. 2, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, pp.153-163
- Levy, B. S., & Sidel, V. W. (2006). The nature of social injustice and its impact on public health. *Social injustice and public health*, 1.
- Longley, R. (2021). All about relative deprivation and deprivation theory. Available at <https://www.thoughtco.com/relative-deprivation-theory-4177591#:~:text=As%20defined%20by%20social%20theorists,obtaining%20the%20things%20of%20which>. Retrieved on 13 September 2022.
- Lynch, M. J., Fegadel, A., & Long, M. A. (2021). Green criminology and state-corporate crime: the ecocide-genocide nexus with examples from Nigeria. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 23(2), 236-256.
- Malthaner, S. (2007). The "Armed Groups Database": Aims, Sources, and Methodology. *Working Papers Micropolitics*.
- Miller, N. E., Sears, R. R., Mowrer, O. H., Doob, L. W. and Dollard, J. (1941). I. The frustration-aggression hypothesis. *Psychological review*, 48(4), 337.
- Nagel, J. (1974), Inequality and Discontent: A Non-Linear Hypothesis, *World Politics*, Vol. 26, pp. 453–472.

- Neocosmos, M. (2011). Transition, human rights, and violence: Rethinking a liberal political relationship in the African neo-colony. *Interface*, 3(2), 359-399.
- Nkem, A. C., Topp, S. M., Devine, S., Li, W. W., & Ogaji, D. S. (2022). The impact of oil industry-related social exclusion on community well-being and health in African countries. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10.
- Nwankpa, M. (2021). Labelling conflict groups in Nigeria: A comparative study of Boko Haram, Niger Delta, IPOB and Fulani militia. In *Armed non-state actors and the politics of recognition* (pp. 49-69). Manchester University Press.
- Nweke, O. C. (2022). *A tale of broken promises: Dilemmas and everyday reintegration tactics of former Niger Delta militants* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Otago).
- Obiam, S. C., and Amadi, O. S. (2022). The Nigerian State and Development in the Niger Delta Region. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 2022, 14(01), 125–133.
- Okonkwo, T., & Etemire, U. (2017). "Oil Injustice" in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region: A Call for Responsive Governance. *Journal of Environmental Protection*, 8(1), 42-60.
- Omadjohwoefe, O. S. (2011). Amnesty initiative and the dilemma of sustainable development in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4(4), 249-258.
- Paterson, T. (2023). Unmasking Ecological Warfare–Shell-BP, Nigeria, and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People.
- Pona, H. T., Xiaoli, D., & Ayantobo, O. O. (2021). Environmental health situation in Nigeria: Current status and future needs. *Heliyon*, 7(3), e06330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06330>.
- Roberts, F. N. (2021). Engendering access to environmental justice in Nigeria's oil producing areas. *Law, Democracy and Development*, 25(SPE), 167-191.
- Smith, H. J., Pettigrew, T. F., Pippin, G. M., & Bialosiewicz, S. (2012). Relative deprivation: A theoretical and meta-analytic review. *Personality and social psychology review*, 16(3), 203-232.
- Ukhurebor, K. E., Athar, H., Adetunji, C. O., Aigbe, U. O., Onyancha, R. B., & Abifarin, O. (2021). Environmental implications of petroleum spillages in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: a review. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 293, 112872.
- Wapmuk, S. (2012). The amnesty programme and the challenges of ending youth militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta. *Insight on Africa*, 4(2), 153-168.