



Blood and Oil: The Niger Delta's Green Tragedy and the Dark Legacy of Poor Governance, 1956–1998

Chukwuzitere M. Nkemdirim, Foster Mayemyan Biyignandam

Department of History University of Mississippi, Oxford USA.

***Corresponding Author:** Foster Mayemyan Biyignandam, Department of History University of Mississippi, Oxford USA.

Abstract: *The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, rich in ecological diversity and natural resources, has long been marred by environmental degradation and socio-political turmoil, particularly following the discovery of oil in 1956. This paper examines the concept of the "Green Tragedy," which encapsulates the devastating consequences of poor environmental governance, militarized mediation, and the exploitation of oil wealth in local communities. By analyzing historical events from 1956 to 1998, including the pivotal execution of environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, the study highlights the complex interplay between environmental policies, corporate interests, and grassroots activism. Employing a historical analysis grounded in archival research and interviews with local stakeholders, the paper reveals how inadequate regulatory frameworks and government negligence have exacerbated ecological crises and fueled conflict in the region. Ultimately, this research underscores the urgent need for transformative governance that prioritizes environmental justice, community well-being, and sustainable development in the Niger Delta, offering critical insights into the broader implications of resource management in environmentally vulnerable regions worldwide.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The NigerDelta region, located in the southern part of Nigeria, has long served as a battleground for the opposition; it is a land rich in ecological diversity and yet marred by environmental degradation, a hub of oil wealth, and plagued by poverty¹, a site of cultural heritage and a breeding ground for conflicts. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri in 1956 put Nigeria among the top ten countries of oil and gas-producing nations of the world.²The year 1956 marked a turning point in this narrative, heralding an era of unprecedented economic potential and ecological devastation. This discovery not only reshaped the region's landscape but also ushered in a period marked by the complex interplay of environmental crisis, contestations, gas flaring, conflicts, and what would come to be known as the "green tragedy."The Niger Delta is a vast region of some 70,000 square kilometers (27,000 square miles) in the south of Nigeria.³ It is a low-lying deltaic region, formed by the Niger River as it flows into the Gulf of Guinea. The delta is home to a diverse population of over 30 million people and is rich in oil and gas resources.⁴ Before the advent of the oil industry, this region was primarily characterized by its rich agricultural practices, fishing, and vibrant local economies. Within this epoch, there was a transition from palm oil to crude oil.⁵ However, this transition to crude oil changed the history of the NigerDelta, promising untold economic growth while inadvertently setting in motion a series of environmental challenges.^{6,7}

¹ Bose Itama, 61, Interviewed at Ijaw, March 15, 2023

²Watts Michael, Oil in Nigeria, "The Impact of Petroleum on a Developing Country". Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 1

³ Intelligence Report On Niger-Delta Land mass, EP 8674, National Archives Enugu State National Archives

⁴ . Watts Michael, "The Niger Delta: Environment and Development". London: Routledge, 1992. P 123.

⁵.VictorUkaogo, & Ogechi, N. C, "Two Oils, One Evil: An Appraisal of Contemporary Dilemma of the indigenous population of Nigeria's Oil-Delta Communities", 1956-2019: Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, 2020 Vol 12, No 3. P. 11.

⁶ . Victor Ukaogo, "Resource Rights Agitation and the New forms of Conflict in the Niger - Delta,

⁷ -2008", Lagos Historical Review: Journal of the Department of History University Of Lagos, 2008,Vol 8, P. 91-112.

As the oil industry's footprint expanded, so did the environmental challenges. From the early signs of pollution and deforestation to the egregious practice of gas flaring, the NigerDelta's ecosystem began to buckle under the weight of unchecked oil extraction. Simultaneously, conflicts emerged between local communities, oil companies, and the government over land rights, resource control, and environmental stewardship.⁸ These challenges set the stage for what would become a tragic narrative a "green tragedy" that encompassed the degradation of the environment, the silencing of local voices, and the human toll of conflict. The significance of the years 1995 and 1998, which mark the culmination of our exploration, cannot be understated. In 1995, the tragic demise of environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa unfolded with his execution, sending shockwaves through the world. His death, orchestrated by the regime of General SaniAbacha, became a poignant symbol of the dire circumstances faced by those advocating for environmental justice in the Niger Delta. This grim event catalyzed global outrage and intensified international pressure to address the rampant environmental degradation and human rights abuses plaguing the region. The November 1995 execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other environmentalists triggered a wave of harsh condemnations from the Western and African leaders, with U.S. President Clinton, announcing a diplomatic effort to secure multi-lateral support for oil embargo.⁹ However, the killing of Ken

Saro-Wiwa and eight others were a sacrifice for the region's struggle and a call for justice against the federal government.⁹ On the other hand, as the year 1998 dawned, the demise of General SaniAbacha marked another critical juncture in the ecological crisis in the region. With his death, the era of his rule ended, bringing a new chapter to Nigeria's history. Abacha's regime, marred by accusations of authoritarianism and suppression, bore witness to the tragic fate of Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed for his activism and underscored the perils faced by environmental activists who dared to challenge the status quo. The interplay between these pivotal events, Saro-Wiwa's execution in 1995 and Abacha's demise in 1998 served as a reminder of the interconnectedness between governance, human rights, and environmental struggles in the Niger Delta and beyond. This paper explores the history of environmental governance failures in the Niger Delta, focusing on the period from 1956 to 1998, using a historical analysis of government policies, oil industry practices, and their impacts. The research draws on archival materials and interviews with local stakeholders to provide firsthand accounts of the environmental and social consequences of oil exploitation. Secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and policy reviews, are also utilized to contextualize these events and examine the broader political and economic dynamics. Through this multi-source approach, the paper traces the links between environmental degradation, conflict, and governance, offering insights into how militarized interventions and government negligence contributed to the ongoing crisis in the Niger Delta. In the pages that follow, we delve into the history of the NigerDelta region from 1956 to 1998, examining the interplay of environmental governance, militarized mediation, gas flaring, and conflicts that contributed to the unfolding green tragedy. Through this exploration, we seek to understand how these factors combined to shape the history of one of Africa's most resource-rich yet environmentally endangered region (Niger – Delta)

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION GAS FLARING

Gas flaring is the burning of natural gas that is produced alongside oil. It is a major environmental problem in the Niger Delta, where it is estimated that over 150 billion cubic feet of gas are flared each year. It is the most complained about of environmental problem.¹⁰ The practice of gas flaring in the Niger Delta dates back to the early days of oil exploration in the region. In the early 1960s, the Nigerian government passed a law that required oil companies to flare all gas that was not used for commercial purposes. This law was motivated by the desire to conserve energy and prevent gas from being wasted. However, the practice of gas flaring has had a devastating impact on the environment and the people of the Niger Delta. Cyril Obi argues that gas flaring is a major contributor to environmental degradation and conflict in the Niger Delta; he documents the health problems,

⁸. Victor Ukaogo, "Resource Rights Agitation and the new forms of Conflict in the Niger - Delta, 1999-2008".

⁹Wumi Raji, Ayodele Ale, & Eni Akinsola, "Boiling Point", A Chdr publication on the Crisis in the oil producing communities in Nigeria. 2000, P.181⁹Bose Itama, 61, Interviewed Cited.

¹⁰Wumi Raji, Ayodele Ale, & Eni Akinsola, "Boiling Point", P.200.

isplacement, and insecurity that have been caused by gas flaring.¹¹ On the other hand, Omotola J. reviews the environmental impacts of gas flaring in the Niger Delta. He finds that gas flaring has a significant impact on air quality, water quality, and soil quality; he also argues that gas flaring contributes to climate change.¹² Moreover, Ukaogo examines the legal and regulatory framework for gas flaring in Nigeria. He argues that the Nigerian government has not done enough to enforce the laws and regulations to prevent gas flaring.¹³ He also argues that the Nigerian government needs to do more to compensate the people who have been affected by gas flaring.

Gas flaring has continued to be a critical issue that has cast a shadow over the Niger Delta's environmental landscape. As Maier affirms, the process of gas flaring had dire ecological consequences, releasing harmful pollutants into the air and contributing to climate change. In his words, he volunteered that:

Gas flaring has been a major problem in the Niger Delta since the early days of oil exploration. The oil companies flare gas because it is cheaper to do so than to capture and sell it. However, gas flaring is a major source of pollution, and it has contributed to climate change. The oil companies have been criticized for their failure to address the problem of gas flaring.¹⁴

Furthermore, the issue of kidnapping of oil workers and blowing up of oil pipelines in Niger Delta has been linked to gas flaring. It has been noted that those who kidnapped oil workers are youths whose brains have been affected by gas flared by the oil companies.¹⁵ The practice of gas flaring elicited public outrage due to its health implications and contribution to global environmental issues. The prevalence of gas flaring stood as a symbol of regulatory shortcomings and the prioritization of corporate profits over ecological well-being. The disparity between the oil companies' economic gains and the local communities' exposure to pollution and health risks was a grand manifestation of the larger environmental governance challenges at play. The incendiary flames of gas flaring illuminated not only the night skies of the Niger Delta but also the profound ecological and health implications plaguing the region. The practice of burning associated gases during oil extraction created an array of devastation, leaving scars on the environment and the well-being of local communities. The toxic pollutants released into the air during the process contributed to a cycle of environmental pollution, causing respiratory problems and exposing communities to heightened health risks.¹⁶ The disastrous impact on the area's ecological and human landscape was mirrored in the flames that lit up the night sky in the Delta. The release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, further exacerbated global warming, highlighting the far-reaching implications of a local practice on a global scale.¹⁶ The environmental challenges of the Niger Delta reverberated beyond its borders, underscoring the urgency of addressing these issues. Concerns have been expressed about the severe implications of gas flaring. The practice not only exacerbated environmental degradation but also contributed to the region's conflict by compounding existing tensions and disparities. The juxtaposition of gas flares against a backdrop of struggling communities magnified the urgency of finding sustainable solutions.

Green Tragedy

In the context of the Niger Delta, the idea of the "Green Tragedy" is a complex depiction of the disastrous effects that have resulted from the convergence of environmental exploitation, political dynamics, and socioeconomic inequities. This term encapsulates the profound consequences of an unbalanced political economy of oil, resounding across the region's history. Coined by scholars and activists, the concept of the "Green Tragedy" resonates with the haunting narrative of exploitation, degradation, and marginalization that has plagued the Niger Delta due to its association with the oil industry. It stands as a reminder of the urgent need for transformative change in the region's history.

¹¹Obi, Cyril, "Environmental Degradation, Conflict and Human Security in the Niger Delta," *A Review: Journal of African Political Economy*, Vol 28, No 58, 2009, P.56

¹²Omotola J Ogunleye, "The Environmental Impacts of Gas Flaring in the Niger Delta" *A Review: Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol 16, No 3, 2014, P. 11

¹³Oguamanam, C., & Bassey, N, "Gas flaring and Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta: A socio-legal perspective". London: Routledge, 2018, P. 32

¹⁴Maier Karl, "The Shell Game: Oil, Politics, and the Niger Delta", London: Penguin Books, 2000. P.23

¹⁵OghenevuoOgene, 67, interviewed at Ogoni, March 15, 2023. ¹⁶Oghenevuo Ogene, 67, interview Cited.

¹⁶IbeanuAkwule A, "Oil, Violence and the Environment in Nigeria", London: Zed Books, 2011. P.8

Renowned scholar Michael J. Watts, in his work *"Oil, Water, and Blood,"* encapsulates the Green Tragedy as a manifestation of a political economy of oil that has perpetuated resource exploitation and the marginalization of the Niger Delta's inhabitants. The oil industry's activities have engendered a cycle of pollution, tainted both the land and water, and decimated precious forests, while displacing communities. Watts laments the Nigerian government's lack of effective regulation of the oil industry, resulting in inadequate compensation for those adversely affected by its practices. Consequently, the Niger Delta has transformed into a theater of environmental decay, poverty, and relentless violence. In his words watts' asserts that:

The green tragedy of the Niger Delta is the product of a political economy of oil that has led to the exploitation of the region's resources and the marginalization of its people. The oil industry has polluted the land and water, destroyed forests, and displaced communities. The Nigerian government has failed to regulate the oil industry or to provide adequate compensation to those who have been affected by its activities. As a result, the Niger Delta has become a region of environmental degradation, poverty, and violence.¹⁷

Niger Delta region has been marred by environmental devastation, Oil spills have contaminated the region's land and water resources, leaving behind a trail of despoiled farmlands and diminished fishery resources. The impact of oil drilling on the delicate ecosystem has led to deforestation, exacerbating issues like soil erosion and contributing to climate change. The Niger Delta stands among the most polluted areas on the global map. However, within the pages of *"The Politics of Oil in the Niger Delta,"* authored by IbeanuUkandi, the issues of the Green Tragedy are further unveiled. This term bears witness to a political economy characterized by the intertwining threads of corruption, violence, and environmental desolation. The oil industry's affluence has favored the privileged and microscopic elite, while the vast majority of the region's population battle pollution and poverty.¹⁸ The Nigerian government's inaction to effectively regulate the industry or to hold corporations accountable has permitted the festering of these injustices. These have resulted in conflict and instability in the Niger Delta, a sobering reflection of the pervasive Green Tragedy. This concept reverberates through history as a reminder that the exploitation of natural resources, when untempered by responsible governance, can yield cataclysmic consequences for both the environment and the people it sustains. It serves as evidence to the urgent need for equitable environmental stewardship, just governance, and collective action to rewrite the narrative of the Niger Delta from one of tragedy to one of transformation.

Militarized Mediation

Militarized mediation, a term that encapsulates the intertwining of armed forces in conflict resolution efforts, holds a complex and often-contradictory role in the context of the Niger Delta's environmental struggles. This concept refers to the deployment of military personnel or the utilization of armed intervention to manage and mitigate conflicts within a given region. In the context of the Niger Delta, militarized mediation refers to the intervention of armed forces, typically government military units, in attempts to address the escalating tensions arising from environmental degradation, resource disputes, and community grievances. However, the application of the militarized mediation as a method of conflict resolution is not without controversy. The presence of armed forces escalates the existing tensions and conflicts. Local communities perceive the military as aligned with the interests of the oil companies and the government, rather than act as impartial arbiters. This perception erodes trust in the mediation process and further deepens grievances, potentially fueling a cycle of violence. Scholars like Jacob Bercovitch defined militarized mediation as:

A form of mediation in which the mediator is a state or international organization that has the capacity to use force. This can be a useful approach to conflict mediation in cases where the parties to the conflict are unwilling to negotiate without the threat of force.¹⁹

¹⁷Watts Michael, "Oil, Water, and Blood: The Political Ecology of Resource Conflict in the Niger Delta", Duke University Press, 2013, p. 12

¹⁸IbeanuUkandi, "The Politics of Oil in the Niger Delta" University Press PLC, 2009, P. 15

¹⁹ Jacob Bercovitch, "Mediating in Violent Conflicts: Principles, Techniques, and Approaches". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, P. 125

On the other hand, Michael Pugh described Militarized mediation as a form of mediation in which the mediator uses the threat or use of force to bring about a peaceful resolution to a conflict.²⁰ This can involve the deployment of troops, the use of air power, or the threat of sanctions. Militarized mediation can be a successful way to end conflicts, but in the Niger – Delta, the force of the army was deployed against unarmed civilians and extracted forced compliance from the natives that could not resist or wade off the threats and dangers associated with the evident possibility of genocide, moreover, these communities were pushed to the wall to the point where they started picking up arms against the military which further escalated the crisis in the region. Mr Ijabo speaking on the fate of the country amid this military mediation in the region noted that the people of Niger-Delta want the country to survive without crisis but the use of the military by the Nigerian government to enforce obedience and silence the people will not work, rather it will continue to escalate the crisis.²¹ However, amid all these catastrophes, environmental governance stands as a pivotal factor in the complex interplay between the Niger Delta's ecological devastation and the conflicts that have marred the region. The role of environmental governance in preventing and resolving conflicts over natural resources becomes evident. In expressing the need of environmental governance, Deng et al maintained that:

Environmental governance can play a role in preventing and resolving conflicts over natural resources. By providing a forum for dialogue and cooperation, environmental governance can help to build trust and understanding between the different stakeholders involved in a conflict. However, environmental governance can also be a source of conflict. When environmental resources are scarce or mismanaged, it can lead to competition and conflict between different groups. This is particularly true in the Niger Delta, where oil extraction has had a devastating impact on the environment and the people who live there.²²

However, in the context of the Niger Delta, militarized mediation as a form of environmental governance became a Double-Edged Sword, a strategy for maintaining stability and a source of additional tension, which led to the killings of both military and civilians in the Niger – Delta region.²⁴ The Niger Delta, a region renowned for its natural beauty and abundant resources, has undergone a tumultuous journey marked by escalating environmental challenges and the complex interplay of militarized mediation. Spanning decades, this narrative reveals a portrayal of the consequences that have unfolded due to the exploitation of the region's resources and the often misguided attempts to mediate the resulting conflicts. As the 1980s dawned, the Niger Delta found itself entangled with environmental issues that cast a shadow over its once-thriving ecosystems. The unchecked expansion of oil activities birthed a host of concerns, from oil pollution and spills to deforestation and biodiversity loss. These challenges, borne from the insatiable thirst for oil resources, began to erode the delicate balance between the region's environment and its indigenous communities. Farmlands were despoiled, water bodies poisoned, and once-lush forests stripped bare. The Niger Delta's ecosystems, which had sustained generations, were now marred by reality of degradation and pollution. Amid this background of ecological distress, the concept of militarized mediation emerged as a proposed panacea for the escalating tensions that arose between the oil companies, government entities, and local communities. Militarized mediation, though heralded as a means to quell conflicts and restore stability, bore witness to unintended repercussions that further escalated the environmental stress of the region. Armed forces, deployed ostensibly to bring order, at times triggered an escalation of violence instead. Rather than serving as a mediating presence, their involvement often deepened the sense of discontent and mistrust among local communities. The cycle of militarized mediation, instead of mitigating the environmental issues, perpetuated a cycle of distrust and insecurity.

Reacting to the issue of militarized mediation in his book “*The Environmental Justice in Nigeria*” Cyril Obi in his exact words said thus:

²⁰Michael Pugh, “Militarized Mediation: Conflict Management and State Building in the Post–Cold War Era” New York: Routledge, 2004, P.1

²¹ Iyabo Etume, 44, interviewed at Agbor, April 24, 2023

²²· Deng Francis M, Reginald S. Hertel, & William Zartman, “Environmental Governance and Conflict Resolution in Africa”, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016. P. 4 ²⁴Waya Bryan, 54, Interview at Ogoni, April 2, 2023.

The militarization of mediation has been a key feature of the Nigerian state's response to environmental conflicts. This has been particularly evident in the case of the Ogoniland conflict, where the Nigerian military has been used to suppress dissent and intimidate environmental activists.²³

The armed presence reinforced the perception that the government and oil companies prioritized their interests above the well-being of the local populace. The strategic interests of the oil industry and the political dynamics at play muddled the efficacy of the militarized mediation, rendering it inadequate in addressing the root causes of the conflicts. While the armed forces aimed to secure oil infrastructure and protect resources, they inadvertently intensified the grievances and heightened community resentment. The people are mistreated and meant to feel marginalized and colonized²⁴ in their region as the state employs militarized mediation methods in the resolution of conflict situations in the region. It is on this not that Ibeanu observed that:

Rather than redress the environmental injustice meted out on the people of these communities, the state, having enmeshed itself in a legitimacy crisis, has resorted to repression and violence to silence restive oil-producing communities.²⁵

The deployment of armed forces further obstructed a comprehensive understanding of the environmental challenges, as attention shifted from the ecological perils to maintaining security. Consequently, the underlying causes of the conflicts, which were deeply intertwined with environmental degradation, remained unaddressed. The very militarized mediation intended to be a remedy for the turmoil ironically perpetuated violence, preventing constructive dialogue and comprehensive solutions. Adding his voice on the issue of militarized mediation in Niger Delta a Scholar asserts that the response of government to issues in Niger Delta has always been that of military force, in the scholar's exact words:

The government has also responded to environmental rights agitation in Niger Delta with Militarized mediation strategy. Indeed, it is the most current style of state response to agitations in the region; it began in the years when communities such as Iko in Akwa-Ibom State and Umuechem in Rivers States were militarily subdued in October 1987, with logistic support from SPDC.²⁶²⁷ In retrospect, the escalation of environmental issues in the Niger Delta during the 1980s and beyond was proof to the dire consequences of resource exploitation. The militarized mediation, despite its stated intentions, only deepened the quagmire of conflicts, intensifying the challenges rather than ameliorating them. A complicated network of dynamics supports conflicts and the ensuing aftereffects. The quest for control of environmental resources is closely entwined with conflict and fuels a tumult of hostility between the government, oil companies, and local communities. Speaking on the plight of the Ijaw people of Niger – Delta, Mr Iyabo highlights that the Niger – Delta people are not confronting the federal government, rather they are only demanding their rights from the government. In his exact words:

“Well we are not confronting the government, we are on our land, we felt we don't want people to come and disturb our wealth. The pipelines are disturbing us; the oil wells are spoiling our environment. Come and remove these things from our land. If you say no that you are going on with your plans and you expect us to keep quiet, no we are going to fight you simply because we are on our land.”²⁹

This multifaceted struggle underscores the region's vulnerability to instability, driven by the volatile interplay of competing interests and deeply rooted grievances. The militarization of the conflict has further complicated the situation. The Niger Delta's story serves as a caution, for the vital need for inclusive, sustainable, and holistic approaches to address environmental degradation. Recognizing the factors at play and the impact on communities is pivotal in charting a new history, one that

²³ Obi Cyril, “The Environmental Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria”, London: Zed Books, 2009. P.102

²⁴ Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Security and the Role of Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta” in Femi Adegbulu (ed), “Topics and Issues in International Relation”, Lagos: Panaf Press, 2006, P. 208

²⁵ Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Security and the Role of Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta” P.208

²⁶ Victor Ukaogo, “Resource Rights Agitation and the new forms of Conflict in the Niger - Delta,

²⁷ -2008”, Lagos Historical Review: Journal of the Department of History University Of Lagos, Vol 8, 2008, P. 106 ²⁹Iyabo John, 56, Interview Cited.

harmonizes the region's ecological integrity with the aspirations of its people. The historical context of the environmental problems in the Niger Delta and the effects of militarized mediation creates a gloomy narrative of unexpected outcomes and exacerbated tensions. The degradation of the environment, coupled with the complexities of political dynamics and resource exploitation, emphasized the need for comprehensive solutions. As the Niger Delta grapples with the legacy of environmental issues and militarized mediation, it serves as a reminder that the pursuit of stability and progress must be grounded in a genuine commitment to environmental justice and community well-being.

Environmental Injustice

The concept of environmental injustice is derived from the movement of *environmental justice* that emerged in the 1980's in recognition of a disproportionate number of environmental burdens in certain communities.²⁸ The idea of environmental justice emerges as a ray of hope in the Niger Delta's history as an equitable solution for the area's numerous problems. The Niger Delta serves as a painful example of the urgency and necessity of attaining environmental justice. This region is blighted by ecological degradation and societal inequalities. Environmental justice, at its core, embodies the principle that all individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, have the right to a healthy environment and the benefits it entails. The Niger Delta's story is fraught with examples of environmental injustices, where communities residing near oil extraction sites experience the brunt realities of pollution, displacement, and health risks. The proliferation of oil activities has disproportionately affected these marginalized communities, engendering a disparity in the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits. Despite the level of environmental damage caused to the people of the Niger Delta, the health implications of pollution, and other issues arising from oil extraction in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government has not properly offered a solution to better the life and environmental condition of the Niger Delta region, thus the call for ecological Justice in the region. Borrowing the exact words of a renowned scholar Eghosa Osaghae in his book *Oil in Nigeria: Politics, Economics, and Environment* affirms that:

The oil industry has had a profound impact on the environment of Nigeria. Oil spills, gas flaring, and other forms of pollution have caused widespread environmental damage. This damage has had a negative impact on the health of the people and the economy of the country.²⁹

The crux of the issue lies in the fact that those who have contributed the least to environmental degradation are often the ones who bear its harshest consequences. Environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is linked to the unequal distribution of resources and political power. The confluence of multinational corporations, government policies, and economic interests has perpetuated a cycle of environmental inequality, where the most vulnerable segments of society pay the highest price for progress. The Nigerian government has not done enough to address the environmental problems caused by the oil industry. The government has failed to enforce environmental regulations, and it has not provided adequate compensation to the people who have been affected by environmental damage.³² In the context of the Niger Delta, The Ogoni people are one of the most marginalized groups in Nigeria. They have been disproportionately affected by the environmental damage caused by the oil industry.³⁰ Environmental justice, therefore, becomes a clarion call for rectifying this systemic imbalance. It necessitates addressing the root causes of environmental disparities and fostering a framework that centers on inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. The struggle for environmental justice in the Niger Delta transcends mere environmental concerns; it is a fight for social equity, human rights, and the restoration of dignity for those who have long been marginalized. However, John Vidal noted clearly that the Nigerian government has been complicit in the environmental injustice faced by the Ogoni people.³¹ The government has cracked down on Ogoni

²⁸ Victor Ukaogo, "Environmental Injustice, Environmental (in) security and Entrenched Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta: Threats and Discontinuities", in "The Green Quagmire: Essay's on Environmental History, New Jersey: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing, (forthcoming), P.3.

²⁹ Osaghae, E, "Oil in Nigeria: Politics, Economics, and Environment", London: Zed Books, 2017, P12³²Osaghae, E, "Oil in Nigeria: Politics, Economics, and Environment", London: Zed Books, 2017, P14

³⁰ Vidal John, "Blood Oil: The Real Price of Petrol" London: Constable, 2009. P.100

³¹ Vidal, John, "Blood Oil: The Real Price of Petrol". P.102

activists who have protested against the oil industry. This has created a climate of fear and intimidation in the region.³²

Despite all these, the government has not put in meaningful structures of development in the region rather they brought in the Niger – Delta development commission as a means to continue their looting.³³ In his exact words:

“If I may ask, did you see any person jubilating over NDDC in Niger – Delta? We are no longer fools. The NDDC, like other development options formulated by past governments since 1960, are all politics to buy time while the looting of our resources continuous”³⁷

The journey towards environmental justice is rife with challenges, as it requires navigating complex political landscapes and dismantling entrenched power structures. As rightly noted by Abiodun Alao in his book *Environmental Justice in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities*, he spelled out that: Environmental justice is a growing movement in Nigeria. The movement is fighting for the rights of the people who have been affected by environmental injustice.³⁴ In addition, the movement is calling on the government to take action to address environmental problems.³⁵ Collaborative efforts among governmental bodies, oil companies, local communities, and environmental organizations are vital to usher in meaningful change. The transition from environmental degradation to environmental justice entails a paradigm shift, a shift from viewing environmental issues as isolated concerns to recognizing them as intertwined with broader societal dynamics. Remedying historical injustices requires a multi-pronged approach that integrates effective environmental governance and policies, environmental protection, economic development, and social equity. Aiming to achieve environmental justice in the Niger Delta necessitates not only addressing existing disparities but also paving the way for a future where ecological integrity and community well-being are harmonized. The Niger Delta's journey towards environmental justice illuminates the path towards a future where communities are not mere witnesses to environmental degradation but active participants in shaping their destiny.

Climate Change

Climate change is a long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local, regional, and global climates.³⁶ Climate change, in its essence, refers to the alteration of long-term weather patterns, resulting in shifts in temperature, precipitation, and sea levels.³⁷ One of the most visible manifestations of climate change in the Niger Delta is the rising sea levels. Low-lying coastal regions, like the Niger Delta, are especially vulnerable to flooding as the world's oceans increase as a result of global warming. This phenomenon poses a grave threat to communities living along the delta's shores, resulting in displacement, loss of livelihoods, and increased conflicts over diminishing resources.

According to NnimmoBasseyetal in their book “*Climate Change and the Niger Delta:*

Impacts, Challenges, and Opportunities”, the authors opined that:

Climate change is already having a significant impact on the Niger Delta, and these impacts are likely to worsen in the future. Sea levels are rising, rainfall patterns are becoming more erratic, and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent. These changes are leading to flooding, erosion, salinization of water, and loss of biodiversity. They are also putting a strain on food production and water resources, and they are increasing the risk of conflict and displacement.³⁸

The relationship between climate change and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is a cyclical one. Environmental degradation, often induced by oil activities, contributes to soil erosion

³² Vidal, John, “Blood Oil: The Real Price of Petrol” P.102

³³ Iyabo Etume, 44, Interview Cited³⁷Iyabo Etume, 44, Interview Cited.

³⁴Abiodun Alao, “Environmental Justice in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities”, Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2016, P.12.

³⁵Abiodun Alao, “Environmental Justice in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities”, P.12

³⁶Bassey N, & Dorsey M, “Climate Change and the Niger Delta: Impacts, Challenges, and Opportunities”, New York, Routledge, 2020, P.9

³⁷Bassey N, & Dorsey M, “Climate Change and the Niger Delta: Impacts, Challenges, and Opportunities” P.9

³⁸Bassey, N., & Dorsey, M, “Climate Change and the Niger Delta: Impacts, Challenges, and Opportunities” P.10

and the loss of protective coastal vegetation. This in turn, renders the delta's coastal communities even more vulnerable to the impacts of rising sea levels and extreme weather events. The oil industry is also contributing to climate change. The oil industry is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, and it is contributing to global warming. This is making climate change worse in the Niger Delta.³⁹ The Niger Delta's response to the climate crisis is emblematic of its resilience and resourcefulness. However, climate change has posed a great threat to the region of the Niger Delta and at the same time acted as a threat to environmental justice. Alao backs this claim by saying that:

Climate change is also a threat to environmental justice in Nigeria. The people who are most affected by climate change are often the same people who are already experiencing environmental injustice. This is because they are often the ones who live in polluted areas, who have limited access to clean water, and who are denied the right to participate in decision-making about environmental issues.⁴⁰

Local communities have devised adaptive strategies, ranging from the construction of protective barriers to the diversification of livelihoods. However, the urgency and complexity of climate change necessitate a broader approach, one that is anchored in global efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, promote sustainable development, and bolster the capacity of vulnerable communities to adapt. As the Niger Delta continues to struggle with the interlocking challenges of environmental degradation, social disparities, and climate change, the imperative of a holistic approach becomes increasingly apparent. Addressing climate change in the Niger Delta requires advocating for equitable climate solutions that account for the historical responsibilities of industrialized nations while safeguarding the rights and well-being of vulnerable communities.

Pollution

The Niger Delta, a once-untouched expanse of lands and thriving ecosystems, now bears the heavy burden of pollution, a somber reflection of a history marred by exploitation and neglect. Pollution can be variously defined. From the subjective level, it could be: “Described as the deliberate or accidental contamination of the environment with man’s waste.”⁴¹ Alternatively, anything that degrades the environment is pollution or put in another way,

“Matter in the wrong place”. A rather more objective definition could be said to represent “...the introduction by man of waste matter or surplus in the environment other than himself, his household, those in his employment and those with whom he has a direct trading relationship”.⁴²

Pollution, in its multifaceted forms, has become an emblem of the region's suffering, a silent assailant that infiltrates the air, water, and land, wreaking havoc on both the environment and the livelihoods of its people. Oil pollution, a hallmark of the region's tragic narrative, casts a pervasive shadow over the delta's landscapes. Ukaogo writing on the impact of pollution in the Niger Delta in his work “*Transnational Business Ethics, Government Policies and The Crisis of Pollution and Underdevelopment in the Niger Delta*”, opined that the impact of these spills was the same; destroyed farmlands, and crops like economic trees, disturbance of economic and social activities. Unemployment arises from all these, ultimately leading to frustration and psychological effects.⁴³ All these affect the health, emotion, leisure, and livelihood and indeed the entire lifestyle and livelihood of the inhabitants. Oil spills, both large and small, have become distressingly common occurrences, staining the earth and waters with a toxic legacy.

The Niger Delta, once a hotbed of biodiversity, now battling with the insidious consequences of oil contamination, which seeps into water bodies, contaminates soil, and disrupts delicate ecosystems. The damage inflicted by oil pollution is far-reaching, damaging human health caused by the specific

³⁹O'Rourke, C, “The Niger Delta: Environment, Development, and Conflict”, Zed Books, 2010, P.10

⁴⁰Abiodun Alao, “Environmental Justice in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities”, P.12

⁴¹Geoffrey Omorodian “The Politics of Pollution”, Punch, Lagos, 16th May, 1985.

⁴²Geoffrey Omorodian “The Politics of Pollution”, Punch, Lagos, 16th May, 1985.

⁴³Victor Ukaogo, “Transnational Business Ethics, Government Policies and the Crisis of Pollution and Underdevelopment in the Niger-Delta”, in Jide Osuntokun & Victor Ukaogo, 2000, “Environmental Problems of the Niger-Delta”, Lagos: Freidrich Ebert Foundation. P.199

presence in air, food, water, and radioactivity.⁴⁴ Also decimating fishing communities, and compromising the sustenance of those dependent on these natural resources.⁴⁵ Gas flaring, a byproduct of oil extraction, exacerbates the pollution predicament, releasing noxious gases into the atmosphere. This not only contributes to air pollution but also intensifies the region's contribution to climate change. Gas flaring is a major contributor to climate change. It is estimated that gas flaring accounts for about 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁶ The causes of pollution in the Niger Delta are intertwined with the systemic failings of environmental governance, which have allowed the unchecked expansion of oil activities without adequate safeguards. Political apathy, lax regulations, and the collusion of vested interests entail the Nigerian state, oil firms, and foreign actors prioritizing profits and their economic interest in the region over the people of the communities and their environmental well-being. These have created an environment where pollution becomes inevitable. The lack of accountability and enforcement mechanisms has emboldened oil companies to prioritize profit over environmental preservation, leaving local communities to bear the brunt of the consequences.

The consequences of pollution in the Niger Delta are deeply entrenched, lasting through generations and inflicting multidimensional harm. Health issues, ranging from respiratory ailments to skin conditions, plague communities living in proximity to oil installations and polluted water bodies.⁴⁷ Food security is weakened and poverty is made worse by the erosion of farmlands and biodiversity, creating a dangerous cycle of vulnerability.⁴⁸ The Niger Delta's struggle against pollution, however, is not one of passive acceptance. It is a struggle fueled by resilience and determination, a testament to the enduring spirit of communities determined to reclaim their environment and livelihoods. Grassroots activism and community mobilization have emerged as potent tools in the battle against pollution, as local voices amplify their demands for justice and accountability. The Niger Delta's plight serves as a rallying call for collaborative action, urging governments, industries, and civil society to collectively address the root causes of pollution and pave the way toward a future where environmental integrity and human well-being coexist harmoniously.

Environmental Governance

Issues of environmental degradation, its health implication, and conflicts arising in the NigerDelta as a result of the discovery of oil and its extraction in the region call for a measure to quell this crisis, in a bid to address these rising issues and conflicts in the region, gave rise to the concept of “Environmental governance” which refers to processes, institutions, and mechanisms through which society manages its relationship with the environment.⁴⁹ Also adding his voice to this concept Ojo defined it as the process of managing human activities to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.⁵⁰ However, in the context of the Niger Delta region, environmental governance takes on particular significance due to the unique environmental and social challenges faced by the area. The Niger Delta, located in Nigeria, is a region rich in oil and gas resources, but it has also been plagued by significant environmental degradation, social unrest, and human rights abuses.⁵⁵ Environmental governance in the Niger Delta involves addressing these issues and working toward sustainable development and equitable resource management.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND EARLY CHALLENGES

In the wake of Nigeria's emergence as an oil-producing nation, the Niger Delta region became a focal point for exploration, as its untapped oil reserves held the promise of unprecedented economic growth. This emergence captured the attention of oil companies and investors, drawing them towards the potential riches concealed beneath the region's subsoil and waterways. Huge oil reserves held the

⁴⁴ Victor Ukaogo, *Transnational Business Ethics*, P.199

⁴⁵ Asari Justice, 64, Interview at Ogoni, April 5 2023

⁴⁶ Arthur, M. K, “Gas flaring in Africa: The climate and human costs”, New York: Routledge, 2010, P. 12

⁴⁷ IbeanuAkwule A, “Oil, Violence and the Environment in Nigeria”, London: Zed Books, 2011. P.8

⁴⁸ IbeanuAkwule A, “Oil, Violence and the Environment in Nigeria”, P.9

⁴⁹ Okonta A. I, &Oronto Douglas, “Environmental Governance in the Niger Delta: Challenges and Prospects”, London: Earthscan, 2001, P. 14

⁵⁰ Ojo O. A, “The Niger Delta: Environment and Development”, London: Routledge, 2005, P. 18. ⁵⁵Mr Bose Itama, 61, Interview Cited.

promise of boosting Nigeria's economy to unprecedented heights and ushering in a period of wealth and growth. However, this period also saw the rise of an environmental problem that would have long-lasting effects. As oil companies set up operations and the nation struggled with its newfound wealth, the fragile ecosystem of the Niger Delta faced the first waves of disruption, setting the stage for complex governance issues and ecological dilemmas.

Early Oil Exploration and Socioeconomic Impacts

The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in 1956 marked a pivotal moment that promised both prosperity and turmoil. With the arrival of oil companies, the region experienced a rise in affluence and economic opportunities. However, these changes were accompanied by profound environmental degradation and social upheaval. Maier points out that local communities were often left marginalized, unable to fully reap the benefits of the oil boom in contrast to the profit-driven oil companies. In his words:

The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in the 1950s was a major turning point for the region. The oil companies brought with them new wealth and opportunities, but they also caused environmental damage and social disruption. The local communities were often marginalized, and they did not benefit from the oil boom in the same way that the oil companies did.⁵¹

This glaring disparity sowed the seeds of discontent and would ultimately fuel conflicts that persisted for decades. The oil companies' entrance into the Niger Delta's landscape transformed the region's economic dynamics but also disrupted traditional ways of life. The rapid exploitation of hydrocarbon led to deforestation, pollution, and dislocation of communities that had depended on the land for their livelihoods. This conflict between development and preservation laid the foundation for the environmental and social challenges that would characterize the following decades.

State–Company Alliance Vs Communities

The emergence of conflicts between local communities and oil companies in the Niger Delta is a complex narrative with deep historical roots. The absence of transparent consultation and equitable benefit-sharing arrangement laid the groundwork for deep-seated resentment. The conflict between local communities and the oil companies in the Niger Delta is a complex issue with a long history. The relationship between the Nigerian state and oil companies in the context of the Niger Delta is marked by a verifiable alliance that has shaped the history of the region's development, conflict, and environmental challenges. Blaming the federal government and Oil Company in Niger – Delta as the orchestrators of the crisis facing the region, Mr Doko noted that:

The oil companies and the government are to be blamed for the criminality raging in the Niger – Delta. The situation is so bad that if you see a child of four, five years now, what he knows is gun; if he hears the sound of gun he will not run, instead he will smile. Gun is not new to Niger – Delta.⁵²

This alliance, as was also described in various scholarly works is underpinned by a complex interplay of power, interests, and disregard for the well-being of local communities. From the insights presented by Obi, it becomes evident that the state has entered into a strategic partnership with oil companies to exploit the abundant oil resources of the Niger Delta. In his exact words:

The state has formed an alliance with oil companies in order to exploit the oil resources of the Niger Delta. This alliance has been facilitated by corruption and cronyism. The state has used its power to allocate oil contracts to its allies, and it has ignored the environmental and social impacts of oil production.⁵³

This collaboration is enabled by corruption, allowing the state to allocate oil contracts to its allies without adequate consideration for the environmental and social consequences of such actions. The state's focus on short-term gains has often resulted in the marginalization of local communities and their interests and at the same time treats the local communities like animals.⁵⁹ To further support the

⁵¹ Maier Karl, "The Shell Game: Oil, Politics, and the Niger Delta" London: Penguin Books, 2000. P.12

⁵² Mr Doko Yanari, 48, Interview at Ogoni, 8 April, 2023.

⁵³ Obi Cyril, "The changing oil economy and conflict in the Niger Delta" London: Zed Books. P.12. ⁵⁹ Mr Doko Yanari, 48, Interview Cited.

claim of state–company alliance, further elaboration can be drawn from Victor Ukaogo's *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Politics, Violence and*

Sustainable Development. In his view, this “unholy alliance” between the state and oil companies is entrenched by the lack of transparency and accountability within the oil industry.⁵⁴ The state's use of its power to suppress dissent and silence protests against the activities of oil companies underscores the extent to which this alliance can be detrimental to the rights and aspirations of the communities affected by oil operations.⁵⁵ However, Omotola J.'s perspective, as presented in "*The Niger Delta: Environment, Development and Conflict*," highlights the imbalance created by this alliance. The state's pursuit of benefits from the oil industry often comes at the expense of the marginalized communities in the Niger Delta.

Quoting his exact words:

The state has used its power to benefit from the oil industry, while the people of the Niger Delta have been marginalized. This has led to a sense of injustice and anger among the people of the region. The state has also used its power to repress dissent and to suppress protests against oil companies.⁵⁶

This imbalance of power has fueled a sense of injustice and resentment among the local population, leading to a cycle of conflict and protests. The curious alliance between the state and oil conglomerates ensures that both make their profit even as the inhabitants suffer from neglect, malnutrition, and economic ruin.⁵⁷ In synthesis, these insights underscore the existence of a tangible and verifiable alliance between the Nigerian state and oil companies. This alliance, while driven by economic interests, has frequently neglected the rights, well-being, and environmental concerns of the communities within the Niger Delta. The consequences of this alliance are manifold, encompassing environmental degradation, social unrest, and a sense of marginalization among the region's inhabitants. These conflicts between the communities and the oil companies have been a major obstacle to development in the Niger Delta.⁵⁸ These disputes were not merely localized grievances; they carried significant implications for the region's socio-economic landscape. The tension between corporate, State interests, and community well-being, stresses the pressing need for well-outlined and effective environmental governance mechanisms that can address economic growth, conflicts, and ecological preservation.

Environmental Degradation, Resource Control, and Conflicts

The neglect of environmental justice issues in Nigeria has painted a picture of gloom over marginalized and economically vulnerable communities, compounding the hardship they face. These communities often bear the consequences of environmental degradation while lacking the resources and political influence to demand redress. The link between environmental issues and social inequality is shown by this evident discrepancy. The degradation of their surroundings not only infringes upon their rights and quality of life but also perpetuates a cycle of inequality and inequity, thus the reason for violence and crises as a way to express their grievances to the government since all peaceful means to handle the situation proves abortive.⁵⁹ The rise of the environmental justice movement is evidence of how resilient these communities are. This movement has fought for the rights of those battling with ecological degradation and resource conflicts, shining a light on the often-overlooked plights of these marginalized groups.⁶⁰ The movement highlights how urgent it is to solve these problems and challenge the status quo by elevating the voices of the people who are affected. The core issue in the conflicts in Niger Delta revolves around, the ownership of land and resources

⁵⁴Victor Ukaogo, “Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Politics, Violence and Sustainable Development”, London: Routledge, 2012, P. 57

⁵⁵Victor Ukaogo, “Oil and insurgency in the Niger Delta: Politics, Violence and Sustainable Development”, P. 57

⁵⁶Omotola, J, “The Niger Delta: Environment, Development and Conflict”. London: Routledge, 2014, P. 78

⁵⁷ Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Security and the Role of Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta” P.208

⁵⁸ Falola, Toyin, and Ann Genova, “The Niger Delta: A History of Violence and Resistance”. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. p. 34.

⁵⁹Mr Ishaku Emmanuel, 46, Interview at Ijaw, 12 April 2023.

⁶⁰ Omotola J. Ogunleye, “Environmental Justice and Resource Conflicts in Nigeria”, London: Zed Books, 2013. P. 18

therein as well as the alienation of the people. These pivotal concerns resonate with the historical grievances and ongoing struggles of the region's inhabitants. The very foundations of identity and livelihood have been overturned. Moreover, as captured in *"Oil, Land, and Identity in the Niger Delta"* by Michael Watts, the oil industry's emergence didn't merely transform the landscape; it dislodged communities from ancestral lands, severing a profound connection to heritage.⁶¹ Adding his voice, Toyin Falola et al in their work *"The Politics of Resource Control in Nigeria"* argued that the absence of an agency over resources extracted from their terrain has propelled the Niger Delta populace into an enduring struggle.⁶² In essence, the nexus of environmental degradation, resource control, and conflicts is underpinned by the painful dilemma of land ownership and the alienation of its stewards.⁶³ The Niger Delta is fighting to regain its history, resources, and this hidden feeling of unhappiness and aspiration is what fuels the region's search for empowerment and justice. Navigating environmental justice, conflicts in Nigeria has proven to be a complex endeavor, exacerbated by the reluctance of both governmental bodies and powerful oil corporations to engage in constructive dialogue. This discordant approach to mediation has hindered the resolution of conflicts and perpetuated animosity between these stakeholders. The militarization of the Niger Delta has been a major factor in the escalation of conflict in the region. The government has deployed troops to the region to suppress the protest activities of local communities, and this has led to a cycle of violence.⁶⁴ In contrast to constructive dialogue, the militarized response has escalated tensions and strained relations between communities and authorities. This not only deepens existing conflicts but also jeopardizes the long-term stability of the region. In pursuing militarized solutions, the path to meaningful resolution becomes increasingly elusive.

The Ogoni, Ken SaroWiwa & Environmental Justice

The convergence of environmental degradation and militarization in the Niger Delta has resulted in a distressing silence of the very voices most affected. The government and oil companies have consistently disregarded the necessity of genuine consultation with these communities. This failure to engage not only exacerbates conflicts but also perpetuates feelings of exclusion and injustice. In the face of these challenges, the environmental justice movement in Nigeria remains a steadfast advocate for those grappling with these issues. This movement has succeeded in bringing the attention of the world to the situation of marginalized people. On the other hand, the movement also encountered opposition from governmental authorities and corporate interests; however, the movement could be seen as an alarm that drew attention to the pressing need for inclusive and participatory approaches to mediation. The Niger Delta, a once-peaceful region with abundant resources, transformed into a battleground where environmental degradation clashed with human rights advocacy. At the forefront of this struggle stood the Ogoni people, led by the indomitable Ken Saro-Wiwa, a visionary who has left a legacy in the history of environmental justice. Ken Saro-Wiwa's influence goes far beyond his role as a Nigerian writer; he emerged as a passionate environmental activist whose dedication to justice and ecological preservation remains an inspiration to this day. Born into an Ogoni family in 1941, Saro-Wiwa's early years were infused with a deep connection to his homeland's rich cultural heritage and a profound understanding of its vulnerability in the face of unchecked industrialization.⁶⁵ His identity as a writer and television producer allowed him to harness the power of communication to expose the environmental injustices plaguing the Niger Delta. The 1980s marked an important juncture as Saro-Wiwa transitioned from a writer into a prominent environmental activist. His voice became a relentless force challenging the Nigerian government's complicity in environmental degradation and the oil industry's disregard for the well-being of local communities.⁶⁶ Saro-Wiwa's unapologetic critiques of these powerful entities manifested in his literary works, where he meticulously documented the escalating ecological crisis brought about by oil extraction in the Niger Delta. This documentation not only highlighted the pressing need for change but also showcased the power of storytelling in creating societal awareness and empathy. However, Saro-Wiwa's activism was

⁶¹Watts, Michael, "Oil, land and Identity in the Niger Delta" Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2009, P.2

⁶²Falola, T., & Paddock, A, "The Politics of Resource Control in Nigeria" London: Zed Books, 2012, P. 12

⁶³Mr Ishaku Emmanuel, 46, Interview

⁶⁴Obi, Cyril, "The Environmental Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria" London: Zed Books, 2009. P.5

⁶⁵Obi, Cyril, "The Environmental Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria" P.18

⁶⁶Mitee, Ledum, "Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Niger Delta" London: Zed Books, 2009. P. 20 ⁷³Mitee, Ledum, "Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Niger Delta"

not confined to the written word. He leveraged his influence to lead protests, demonstrations, and advocacy campaigns that spotlighted the detrimental impacts of multinational oil corporations on the environment and livelihoods of local communities.⁷³ Through these actions, Saro-Wiwa bridged the gap between theory and practice, making tangible strides in exposing the grave consequences of environmental degradation while rallying communities to demand justice.

The journey towards environmental justice found its articulation in the Ogoni Bill of Rights, which was created by the Ogoni people and presented to the Nigeria government in 1990⁶⁷ and the Kaiama Declaration, which was a statement made in 1998⁶⁸ by a group of Ijaw Youths of Nigeria demanding greater control over the resources in their region. Both documents highlight the struggles of these indigenous groups in Nigeria to assert their rights and gain greater control over their land and resources. Drawing reference from these two documents, *the Ogoni Bill of Rights* presents the following demands:

The Bill of Rights presented to the government and the people of Nigeria called for political control of Ogoni affairs by the Ogoni people, control and use of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development, adequate and direct representation as of right for Ogoni people in all Nigeria National institutions and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation.⁷⁶

On the other hand, the Ijaw youths made the following demand through the Kaiama declaration:

The Kaiama declaration made a number of resolutions, of which the most important were statements that all land and natural resources (including Mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw Communities and that Ijaw youth council ceased to recognize all decrees enacted without our participation and consent. In line with these statements, the youths also called for the military to withdraw from the region, and warned oil companies that they would be regarded as an enemy if they relied on military protection.⁷⁷

The Ogoni and Ijaw people, dispossessed of their ancestral lands and livelihoods, harnessed the power of these declarations to demand their rightful place in the stewardship of their environment. These demands center on the principles of justice, sovereignty, and self-governance and emphasize the essence of community-led environmental justice. However, the people are still mounting pressure on the government to pass the Bills of these declarations into law.⁶⁹

Moreover, it could be argued that the lingering crisis and conflict in Niger Delta has a link with foreign interests. Foreign interests complicated the dynamics of the Niger Delta conflict. It is on this point that a scholar in his work “*Environmental Injustice, Environmental (in) Security and Entrenched Foreign Interest in the NigerDelta*,” emphasized the disproportionate influence of foreign conglomerates, notably the United States. The United States, the largest market for Nigerian crude oil, wielded substantial economic power, perpetuating the lopsided arrangement that favored foreign domination.⁷⁰ The alliance between Nigeria and foreign conglomerates evident since colonial times, further entrenched the stranglehold of foreign capital. Shell's expansive rights granted in 1938 epitomized this foreign dominance, an economic fortune siphoned off to foreign entities while Indigenous communities live with the consequences.⁷¹ In his words:

The prospect for a reduction in the gap of foreigners in the economy and a diminished role of oil in the state economy appear certainly slim as the contribution of oil to the federal purse revenue remains more relevant and significant as the years roll by. It does appear from all indications that the state is satisfied by this arrangement wherein foreign capital dominates the economy.⁸¹

Judging from the above excerpts and arguments, one could see that the conflict and crisis in Niger Delta is a game of interest both on the side of the Nigerian government whose major source of

⁶⁷ Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, “Ogoni Bill of Rights”, Saros International Publishers. 1990, P. 1

⁶⁸ Joseph OllorObari, “Why Niger Delta Crisis Festers”, Lagos: Guardian, 1999. ⁷⁶Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, P. 377Joseph OllorObari, “Why Niger Delta Crisis Festers”, Lagos: Guardian, 1999.

⁶⁹AnyanuOgene, 58, Interviewed at Ogoni, 16 April, 2023.

⁷⁰ Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Injustice, Environmental (In) Security and Entrenched Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta: Threats and Discontinuities”, P.8

⁷¹ Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Injustice, Environmental (in) security and Entrenched Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta: Threats and Discontinuities”, P.3. ⁸¹Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Injustice, Environmental (in) security and Entrenched Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta: Threats and Discontinuities”, P.12.

revenue comes from the Oil in Niger Delta and others. On the other hand, foreign interests in Niger Delta are evidenced in the huge economic resources they extract from oil in the region through their various companies, all at the detriment of the localities and inhabitants of the Niger Delta region. It could be categorically stated that the conflicts and crises in Niger Delta are underpinned by the conspirational interest of the state and foreign interests.

On the other hand, the fight against environmental injustice has continued as was led by Ken Saro-Wiwa and fellow Ogoni activists. The Ogoni Movement's resolute pursuit of justice and environmental integrity encountered a formidable adversary in the Nigerian government, which responded to their demands with repression and violence. In a deeply distressing turn of events, government troops were deployed to the Niger Delta, resulting in the arrest, intimidation, and tragic killings of numerous Ogoni activists.⁷² This militarized suppression contrasted the movement's peaceful tactics and thus exposed the brutal mechanisms employed to stifle dissent and preserve the interests of powerful entities. The nadir of this conflict arrived in 1995 with the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists. This grievous act sent shockwaves through the global community, galvanizing widespread condemnation and spurring renewed commitment to the environmental justice cause. While Saro-Wiwa's tragic demise was an immense setback, the Ogoni Movement's spirit endured. The movement's legacy continues to serve as a reminder of the sacrifices made in the name of justice, and its tenacity fuels ongoing efforts to secure the rights and well-being of the Ogoni people.

4. KEN SARO WIWA AND THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CONFLICT

The 1990s marked a turning point as global outrage met the Green Tragedy unfolding in the Niger Delta. As news of environmental devastation and human rights abuses reached global audience, a wave of advocacy and outcry reverberated around the world. The international community grappled with the implications of a region in turmoil, ultimately leading to a reevaluation of environmental governance, economic interests, and the power of collective voices. The 1990s bore witness to a political landscape dominated by the iron-fisted rule of General Sani Abacha's regime. This era was characterized by the ruthless suppression of civil rights, the dismantling of democratic institutions, and the widespread silencing of dissent. Abacha's regime engendered a climate of fear, where any form of opposition, including environmental activism, was met with harsh reprisals and repressive measures.

As portrayed by a scholar in his book "*Blood Oil: The Real Price of Petrol*," the execution of

Ken Saro-Wiwa occurred against the backdrop of Abacha's authoritarian stronghold.⁷³ Abacha's military dictatorship sought to consolidate power by quashing any perceived threats, and Saro-Wiwa's vocal advocacy for environmental justice and the rights of the Ogoni people posed a challenge to the regime's control. Under Abacha's rule, human rights were trampled upon, and the legal and civic avenues for dissent were systematically dismantled. The Ogoni activists' efforts to challenge the ecological devastation wrought by oil extraction were met with repression and violence, as Abacha sought to crush any opposition to his rule.⁷⁴ This ruthless suppression forced the Ogoni Movement to operate underground, demonstrating the regime's unwavering commitment to silencing voices of dissent. The international impact of Saro-Wiwa's execution was seen within the broader narrative of environmental justice. Michael Watts emphasized that:

The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the environmental degradation of the

Niger Delta brought the issue of environmental justice to the forefront of the

global stage. People around the world demanded that the Nigerian government and the oil companies be held accountable for their actions.⁷⁵

The execution was seen as a crucial moment that crystallized the interconnectedness of political repression and environmental degradation. The global community could not ignore the stark contrast

⁷² Obi, Cyril, "The Environmental Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria" London: Zed Books, 2009. P.19

⁷³ Vidal, John, "Blood Oil: The Real Price of Petrol" London: Constable, 2009. P.21

⁷⁴ Yergin, Daniel, "Crude: The Story of Oil" New York: Penguin, 1991.

⁷⁵ Watts, Michael, "The Shell Shocked Niger Delta: Anatomy of an Oil Spill" London: Verso, 2011.P.24

between Abacha's oppressive regime and the urgent need to address the ecological crises in the Niger Delta. The execution of Saro-Wiwa not only symbolized the challenges faced by environmental activists under authoritarian regimes but also exemplified the far-reaching consequences of a political climate that trampled on civil rights.

Saro-Wiwa's Execution: Catalyst for International Outrage

Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution in 1995 resonated as a defining moment that ignited an unprecedented wave of international outrage and advocacy. His unyielding commitment to environmental justice, combined with the circumstances surrounding his death, galvanized a global response that transcended borders and cultural barriers. Widespread condemnation of the killing as a serious injustice, served as a highlight to the dangerous risks faced by environmental activists in the Niger Delta when challenging the relationship between corporate interests and political power in pursuit of justice and sustainability.

The international community rallied behind Saro-Wiwa's legacy, vehemently condemning the Nigerian government's actions. The response was not limited to mere condemnation; it translated into concrete actions such as calls for sanctions against Nigeria.⁷⁶ The execution became a rallying cry for those who recognized the urgent need to address not only human rights abuses but also the systemic environmental degradation perpetuated by the oil industry. Saro-Wiwa's execution was a catalyst for a global awakening on issues of environmental justice. The global outcry was not confined to a single nation or community; it penetrates across borders, leading to a wave of protests, demonstrations, and renewed activism. The execution became a call to action that transcended geopolitical boundaries, uniting people under a shared commitment to safeguard the environment and demand accountability from both corporate entities and governments.

Green Tragedy on the Global Stage: Demands for Change

The aftermath of Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution marked a significant moment in the history of environmental advocacy, propelling the Niger Delta's issues to the forefront of the global stage and initiating a demand for far-reaching change. Saro-Wiwa's execution brought to the forefront the Niger Delta's environmental and human rights challenges. The tragedy served as a stark reminder that the true cost of oil extraction extended beyond monetary gains, encompassing ecological devastation, loss of livelihoods, and the erosion of human rights. The renewed focus on these intertwined challenges prompted a reevaluation of how societies and governments engage with resource extraction. Saro-Wiwa's execution triggered a global call for a new approach to oil extraction in the Niger Delta.⁷⁷ Recognizing the inherent link between environmental sustainability and human rights, the international community demanded a paradigm shift that prioritized the well-being of local communities, the preservation of ecosystems, and the equitable distribution of benefits.

5. MITIGATION CONFLICTS AND FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

As the Niger Delta faces the devastating consequences of decades of environmental degradation and conflict, the need for innovative approaches to environmental governance, conflict resolution, and sustainable development becomes increasingly evident. Rethinking the way resource regions are managed and addressing pressing issues such as gas flaring are essential steps toward mitigating the damage inflicted on the region's ecosystems and communities. Environmental governance in resource-rich regions like the Niger Delta presents complex challenges. These areas often harbor valuable natural resources, which unfortunately fuel conflicts over their control and exploitation. Striking a balance between economic development and environmental preservation becomes a daunting task in such contexts; effective environmental governance must harmonize these competing interests.

One promising approach involves adopting a more bottom-up strategy, wherein local communities assume a more active role in decision-making processes. Empowering these communities can ensure that their environmental concerns are considered during resource extraction endeavors, fostering collaboration and understanding. Another way to rethink environmental governance for resource regions is to focus on the use of market-based mechanisms, such as carbon pricing or cap-and-trade

⁷⁶ Yergin, Daniel, "Crude: The Story of Oil" New York: Penguin, 1991. P.460

⁷⁷ Yergin, Daniel, "Crude: The Story of Oil", P.461

systems. These mechanisms can help to internalize the environmental costs of resource extraction and encourage more sustainable practices.⁷⁸

Gas flaring, a significant source of environmental degradation and health hazards, requires urgent attention. There are several technological solutions to gas flaring, such as reinjecting the gas into the ground or using it to generate electricity.⁷⁹ However, these solutions can be expensive, and there is often a lack of political will to implement them. Beyond technological remedies, policy interventions are critical. Proposals such as imposing taxes on gas flaring or enforcing regulations that mandate the capture and utilization of gas have been suggested. However, resistance from the oil industry and governmental challenges can hinder the adoption of these policies effectively addressing gas flaring necessitates striking a balance between technological feasibility, economic viability, and environmental stewardship.

At the heart of mitigating environmental tragedies and promoting future sustainability lies the concept of sustainable development. Wolfgang Sachs highlights the complexity of this endeavor, as it involves reconciling various conflicting objectives like economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice.⁸⁰ Striking a balance among these often-disparate goals requires innovative approaches and cross-sector collaboration. Equity emerges as a key principle in reconciling these diverse interests. Ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are distributed fairly and that vulnerable communities are not disproportionately burdened by the costs of environmental degradation becomes paramount. Furthermore, the concept of efficiency, reducing waste, and optimizing resource utilization, serves as another avenue towards sustainable development, benefiting both the environment and the economy. As the Niger Delta continues to deal with the legacy of environmental degradation and conflict, these multifaceted approaches hold the potential to pave a path towards mitigation and a more sustainable future. By reimagining governance strategies, addressing pressing challenges like gas flaring, and fostering equitable and efficient development, the region may yet overcome the green tragedy that has marred its history.

6. CONCLUSION: REFLECTING ON THE GREEN TRAGEDY AND THE NIGER – DELTA

The culmination of our exploration into the NigerDelta region's history from the 1950s to 1998 unveils a profound and deeply resonating narrative of the Green Tragedy. This narrative shares a haunting message of environmental degradation, conflicts, and an unwavering quest for justice. As we conclude, it is abundantly clear that the insights we have gathered from this chapter hold significant value. They are not mere fragments of the past, but rather directions that can guide us collectively towards a more sustainable and justifiable future.

The pages of history reveal a disheartening reality; the pervasive and glaring inadequacies within the prevailing environmental governance structures that governed the NigerDelta. The initial euphoria that accompanied the discovery of oil in the 1950s seemed to promise boundless prosperity and advancement. What commenced as a promise of development inadvertently metamorphosed into an environmental catastrophe that defied imagination, as time went on, the environmental dangers became clearer, causing harm to the delicate ecosystem of the region due to inappropriate extraction. Despite growing awareness of the impending disaster, the mechanisms of environmental governance failed in their mandate. The tragedy that unfolded was not merely an outcome of short-sighted policies; it was an embodiment of systemic failure, clear evidence to the flawed system that prioritized economic interests over ecological preservation. As the oil flows gave rise to prosperity, they also gave birth to environmental issues that disproportionately afflicted the local communities, marking them as sacrificial offerings at the altar of progress.

The lessons of history resonate over time to enlighten our future course. The accounts of the NigerDelta Green Tragedy act as a warning of the dangers of unrestricted resource extraction and insufficient environmental governance. A warning from the past should serve as our guidance as we enter a world where the need for resources and expansion must be balanced with the requirements of

⁷⁸. Dauvergne Peter, & Timmons Roberts, "Rethinking Environmental Governance for Resource Regions" Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. P. 4-5.

⁷⁹. Economides Michael J., & Michael A. Konar, "Addressing Gas Flaring: Technological Solutions and Policies" New York: Routledge, 2016, P.2

⁸⁰. Sachs Wolfgang, "Sustainable Development: Reconciling Conflicts for the Future" London: Zed Books, 2015, P. 3

ecological care. The story of the Ogoni Movement is a demonstration of the effectiveness of group action and the strength of grassroots mobilization. It highlights the tenacity of individuals who refuse to accept the Green Tragedy as a victim, turning their sorrow and pain into a cry for change. The martyrdom of Ken Saro-Wiwa, which sparked a global uproar, proved that one voice could resonate across continents and compel people all over the world to see the injustices committed against the NigerDelta region.

As we come to the end of this historical exploration, the lessons learned from the NigerDelta Green Tragedy beckon us to contemplate a future that is harmonized with both human aspirations and the integrity of the environment. The story emphasizes the need for resource-rich areas to be guided by a system with openness, accountability, and environmental justice. The governments, industries, and communities are to forge collaborative solutions that can harmonize the pursuit of economic prosperity with the stewardship of the natural world. Environmental issues are not decided in corporate boardrooms or administrative hallways. It must resound through the brains of decision-makers facing difficult choices, through the corridors of power and industry that determine the future of regions, and through the actions of the communities that have suffered the most as a result of the Green Tragedy. It is an appeal for a harmonious, well-balanced society where appreciation for the environment that supports us all takes precedence above greed and profit. In conclusion, the Green Tragedy of the NigerDelta is a striking reality and a caution that implores us to reassess the course of resource-driven progress. The knowledge recorded in the past must serve as a lighthouse that points us in the direction of a future in which preserving the environment and advancing humankind coexist harmoniously. The NigerDelta story serves as a reminder that we all have a responsibility to uphold our history, navigate the difficulties of the present, and create a future that embodies fairness, inclusivity, and ecological longevity as the world community struggles with the urgent needs of a rapidly changing world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources i. See Part B ii. Archival Materials

Intelligence Report on Niger-Delta Land Mass, EP 8674, National Archives Enugu State National Nigeria

Secondary Sources

Abiodun Alao, "Environmental Justice in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities", Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2016.

Arthur, M. K, "Gas flaring in Africa: The climate and human costs", New York: Routledge, 2010.

Bassey, N., & Dorsey, M, "Climate Change and the Niger Delta: Impacts, challenges, and opportunities", New York, Routledge, 2020.

Deng, Francis M., Reginald S. Hertel, and I. William Zartman, "Environmental Governance and Conflict Resolution in Africa", Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016.

Falola, T., & Paddock, A, "The politics of Resource Control in Nigeria" London: Zed Books, 2012.

Falola, Toyin, and Ann Genova, "The Niger Delta: A History of Violence and Resistance". Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Geofrey Omorodian "The Politics of Pollution", Punch, Lagos, 16th May, 1985.

IbeanuUkandi, "The Politics of Oil in the Niger Delta" University Press PLC, 2009.

Ibeanu, Akwule A, "Oil, Violence and the Environment in Nigeria", London: Zed Books, 2011.

Jacob Bercovitch, "Mediating in Violent Conflicts: Principles, Techniques, and Approaches". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Joseph OllorObari, "Why Niger Delta Crisis Festers", Lagos: Guardian, 1999.

Maier Karl, "The Shell Game: Oil, Politics, and the Niger Delta" London: Penguin Books, 2000.

Michael Pugh, "Militarized Mediation: Conflict Management and State Building in the Post-Cold War Era" New York: Routledge, 2004.

Mitee, Ledum, "Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Niger Delta" London: Zed Books, 2009.

Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, "Ogoni Bill of Rights", Saros International Publishers. 1990.

Obi Cyril, "Environmental Degradation, Conflict and Human Security in the Niger Delta." A Review:

Journal of African Political Economy, Vol 28, No 58, 2009.

Obi Cyril, “The changing Oil Economy and Conflict in the Niger Delta” London: Zed Books.

Obi Cyril, “The Environmental Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria”, London: Zed Books, 2009.

Obi, Cyril, “The Environmental Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria” London: Zed Books, 2009.

Oguamanam, C., &Bassey, N, “Gas flaring and Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta: A Socio-legal perspective”. London: Routledge, 2018.

Ojo O. A, “The Niger Delta: Environment and Development”, London: Routledge, 2005.

Okonta A. I, &Oronto Douglas, “Environmental Governance in the Niger Delta: Challenges and Prospects”, London: Earthscan, 2001.

Omotola J. Ogunleye, “Environmental Justice and Resource Conflicts in Nigeria”, London: Zed Books, 2013.

Omotola, J, Ogunleye “The Environmental Impacts of Gas Flaring in the Niger Delta” A Review: Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, Vol 16, No 3, 2014.

Omotola, J, Ogunleye “The Niger Delta: Environment, Development and Conflict”. London: Routledge, 2014.

O'Rourke, C, “The Niger Delta: Environment, Development, and Conflict”, Zed Books, 2010.

Osaghae, E, “Oil in Nigeria: Politics, Economics, and Environment”, London: Zed Books, 2017.

Sachs Wolfgang, “Sustainable Development: Reconciling Conflicts for the Future” London: Zed Books, 2015.

Ukaogo, V. O., &Ogechi, N. C, “Two Oils, One Evil: An Appraisal of Contemporary Dilemma of the Indigenous Population of Nigeria's oil-Delta Communities”, 1956-2019: Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, 2020 Vol 12, No 3.

Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Injustice, Environmental (in) Security and Entrenched Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta: Threats and Discontinuities”, in “The Green Quagmire: Essay’s on Environmental History, New Jersey: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing, (forthcoming).

Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Security and the Role of Foreign Interest in the Niger-Delta” in Femi Adegbulu (ed), “Topics and Issues in International Relation”, Lagos: Panaf Press, 2006

Victor Ukaogo, “Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Politics, violence and sustainable Development”, London: Routledge, 2012.

Victor Ukaogo, “Resource Rights Agitation and the New Forms of Conflict in the Niger - Delta, 1999-2008”, Lagos Historical Review: Journal of the Department of History University Of Lagos, 2008, Vol 8, P. 91-112.

Victor Ukaogo, “Transnational Business Ethics, Government Policies and the Crisis of Pollution and Underdevelopment in the Niger-Delta”, in Jide Osuntokun& Victor Ukaogo, “Environmental Problems of the Niger-Delta”, Lagos: Freidrich Ebert Foundation, 2000

Vidal John, “Blood Oil: The Real Price of Petrol” London: Constable, 2009.

Watts, Michael J. “Oil, Water, and Blood: The Political Ecology of Resource Conflict in the Niger Delta”, Duke University Press, 2013.

Watts, Michael, “Oil, land and Identity in the Niger Delta” Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2009.

Watts, Michael, Oil in Nigeria, “The Impact of Petroleum on a Developing Country”. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Watts, Michael, “The Shell Shocked Niger Delta: Anatomy of an Oil Spill” London: Verso, 2011.

Watts, Michael. “The Niger Delta: Environment and Development”. London: Routledge, 1992.

Wumi Raji, Ayodele Ale, & Eni Akinsola, “Boiling Point”, A Chdr publication on the Crisis in the oil producing communities in Nigeria. 2000.

Yergin, Daniel, “Crude: The Story of Oil” New York: Penguin, 1991.

PART B

List Of Informants

S/N	NAME	GENDER	AGE	OCCUPATION	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1	Mr Bose Itama	M	61	Trader	Ijaw	15 th March 2023
2	Mr	M	67	Trader	Ogoni	15 th March 2023

	Oghenevuo Ogene					
3	Waya Bryan	M	54	Trader	Ogoni	2 nd April 2023
4	Iyabo John	M	56	Farmer	Ijaw	4 th April 2023
5	Asari Justice	M	64	Farmer	Ijaw	5 th April 2023
6	Mr Doko Yanari	M	48	Trader	Ogoni	7 th April 2023
7	Mr Ishaku Emmanuel	M	46	Farmer	Ijaw	16 th April 2023
8	Mr Iyabo Etume	M	44	Farmer	Ijaw	16 th April 2023
9	Boya Lakide	M	65	Farmer	Ogoni	17 th April 2023
10	Dakuku Moye	M	60	Farmer	Ogoni	17 th April 2023
11	Ayanu Ogene	M	58	Trader	Ogoni	16 th April 2023

Unabridged Report of Oral Interview

Name: Mr Oghenevuo Ogene Occupation: Trader

Age: 67 Date of Interview 15th march 2023 Place of Interview: Ijaw

Question: Sir, why are there cases of kidnapped oil workers, are you people not going too far?

Answer: Those who kidnap oil workers are not normal and this was as a result of gas flared into their brains by oil companies. It is the polluted brains that are kidnapping oil workers and blowing up pipelines.

Question: How bad has the environment been polluted?

Answer: My son, very very bad. In fact, in some places in Niger – Delta, there is no drinking water, the air is polluted, and all rivers are polluted and have continued to cause different kinds of health challenges.

Name: Mr Bose Itama Occupation: Trader Age: 61 Date of Interview 15th march 2023 Place of Interview: Ijaw

Question: Sir, why do you think Niger – Delta that is rich with oil resources is still battling with poverty and environmental issues?

Answer: It was because our fathers folded their hand that is why we are suffering it today.

Question: The hanging of Ken – Saro Wiwa and other Ogoni people on Nov 10 1995 shocked the world, how did your people remember the event?

Answer: ken Saro – Wiwa and his other comrades laid down their lives for the sake of the Niger – Delta. They were murdered in order to permanently suppress the Niger delta population.

However, I can guarantee you that Nigeria has murdered sleep and she will sleep no more.

Question: in the issue of military mediation and killings how are you people responding to it?

Answer: if military kill one Ijaw youth, we are going to kill ten oil workers in retaliation. They will witness young people shooting down helicopters at this time.

Name: Mr Waya Bryan Occupation: Trader Age: 54 Date of Interview 2nd April 2023 Place of Interview: Ogoni

Question: what exactly is the struggle/agitation for in the Niger – Delta?

Answer: Here we are agitating against two things: self-determination and environmental justice. Our environment is under threat and so is our existence because strangers are destroying our environment daily for economic reasons and we don't know how our children will live in this

very environment when our generation is gone. Our farmlands, water bodies, and our forest have all been affected.

Name: Mr Iyabo John Occupation: Farmer Age: 56 Date of Interview 4th April 2023 Place of Interview: Ijaw

Question: How long do you think Ijaw can hold on the confrontation?

Answer: Well, we are not confronting the federal government, we are on our land, we felt we don't want people to come and disturb our wealth. The pipeline is disturbing us; the oil wells are spoiling our environment. Come and remove these things from our land, if you say no, that you are going on with your plans and you expect us to keep quiet, no we are going to fight you because we are on our land.

Question: what are the major issues that are affecting the people?

Answer: There are several issues but the major challenges we face are pollution, displacement and health risks.

Name: Asari Justice Occupation: Farmer Age: 64 Date of Interview 5th April 2023 Place of Interview: Ijaw

Questions: How bad has pollution affected businesses in the Niger – Delta?

Answer: Answering this question gets me into tears. The pollution in Niger – Delta has affected 70% of the businesses and pushed many into poverties. For instance, many communities in Niger – Delta that depends on fishing for survival has been affected drastically because the waters have been contaminated by oil spills.

Name: Mr Doko Yanari Occupation: Trader Age: 48 Date of Interview 8th April 2023 Place of Interview: Ogoni

Question: who is to be blamed for the new dimension to the Niger – Delta crisis?

Answer: The oil companies and the government are to be blamed for the criminality raging in the Niger – Delta. The situation is so bad that if you see a child of four, five years now, what he

knows is gun; if he hears the sound of gun he will not run, instead he will smile. For Niger - Delta Children, guns are nothing new.

Question: from the way you talk, is as though you don't belong to Nigeria again. Do you know you are still part of Nigeria?

Answer: Yes, and that is why we should live like animals in the jungle! We are part of the country and the country is making us live like animals and marginalize us. Such cannot be justified.

Name: Mr Ishaku Emmanuel Occupation: Farmer Age: 46 Date of Interview 16th April 2023 Place of Interview: Ijaw

Question: The government is saying the Ijaw man should reject violence and accept dialogue so to what extent do you think the Ijaw can go, claiming their right through violence?

Answer: In-fact if you are demanding for anything or if you are doing anything in life, it is good to use peaceful means to achieve it. But where peace fails, violence will be the last resort. The government that is saying Ijaw should reject violence has no moral right to say that. In 1966, the army used violence to get what they wanted.

Question: What is the place of land in the conflicts in Niger – Delta?

Answer: That's a good question. In fact, one of the core causes of conflict in the region is the issue of land ownership. We want our lands back, our lands were taken from us, the resources in it were extracted and yet we that own the land and the resources are dying in poverty and struggling with environmental challenges.

Name: MrAyanuOgene Occupation: Trader Age: 58 Date of Interview 16th April 2023 Place of Interview: Ogoni

Question: Has the Kaiama declaration been passed as a bill in the house?

Answer: We are putting pressure on the Government to pass the kaiama declaration bill into law.

Question: on the agitation to control your own resources (one of the issues of Kaiama declaration) 165 staff of shell including 65 expatriates was kidnapped. Are your people not going too far?

Answer: In the first place, what are the oil workers doing in the place where they were kidnapped? We have made it clear to the whole world that no oil company should operate in our area until we see development with our eyes.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Chukwuzitere M. Nkemdirim holds a Bachelor's degree in history from the University of Nigeria Nsukka, he is currently a master's student of history at the University of Mississippi, United States where he pursues a deep engagement with colonial and post-colonial African history, focusing on environmental and socio-political histories. His current research explores critical issues such as climate change, resource scarcity, and conflict, focusing on Nigeria's Benue Valley. He seeks to unravel the complex interactions between human societies and their environments through his work, highlighting how historical narratives shape current understanding. He is committed to advancing African historiography,

challenging conventional perspectives, and bringing forward underrepresented voices in historical discourse. He aims to contribute meaningful insights that resonate within academic circles and beyond.



Foster Mayemyan Biyignandam graduated from the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts in history. He is currently a master's student and teaching assistant in the history department at the University of Mississippi. His area of expertise is colonial West African economic history, particularly emphasizing the history of Ghana's labor, industrial development, and trade. Foster co-authored a paper on the idea of the "Green Tragedy," which examines the Niger Delta's environmental problems between 1956 and 1998. His current research aims to investigate the effects of British forced labor policies on Ghana's socioeconomic and political climate by analyzing the North-South labor

migration system in the Gold Coast between 1927 and 1950.

Citation: Chukwuzitere M. Nkemdirim & Foster Mayemyan Biyignandam. "Blood and Oil: The Niger Delta's Green Tragedy and the Dark Legacy of Poor Governance, 1956–1998" in *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 11, no.11, 2024, pp. 52-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.1111005>.

Copyright: © 2024 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.