

Illegal Oil Bunkering in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Challenge to Nigeria's Development

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Abstract

Illegal oil bunkering is a regular activity in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria. Despite the huge financial cost on the part of the government and the multinational oil companies, the perpetrators of this business continue to expand their operations in the creeks. Illegal oil bunkering is now a booming business in the Niger Delta. It is believed to involve the different local militant groups in creeks, commodity traders, military personnel, international businessmen, and some indigenous oil servicing companies. The successes of illegal oil bunkering in Nigeria have been ascribed to both local and national interest as a result of the profits from this illegal oil business. This study critically examines the key actors of illegal oil bunkering; the root causes and consequences of illegal oil bunkering, and the solutions to the identified challenges.

Keywords: Illegal oil bunkering, Niger Delta region, environmental challenges, exploration, oil companies, militancy

1. Introduction

Nigeria was beforehand the fifth-biggest oil-producing country in the world, but at present, is the thirteenth biggest because of various mechanical calamities that continue disturbing its production combined with the worldwide reduction of oil and gas costs since the third quarter of 2014 (Albert, Amaratunga & Haigh, 2019). It is no longer a debate that Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and possibly the richest in the continent (Paki & Ebienu, 2011). The surplus human and material resources can

provide the nation with several opportunities for national development (Oyakorotu, 2008). The nation has proudly relied solely on profits from the sales of crude oil and manages whenever the price of crude oil in the international market goes down. As long as the revenue from the oil can keep all her citizens alive for one more day, an alternative source of income for the country has never been a serious option. However, the government now has a bigger concern as her precious natural resources (crude oil) are being stolen from the site and sold by a self-acclaimed stakeholder (the militant groups in the Niger Delta and their financier). It has been reported that daily, Nigeria is losing more 300,000 barrels of crude oil to illegal bunkering which is equivalent to 15% of the 2.4 million barrels of crude oil produced by the nation (Campbell, 2015). These losses due to oil theft, when quantified into monetary terms, it was discovered that the government is losing \$1.7 billion monthly (Campbell, 2015).

Illegal oil bunkering has made oil spillages and explosions a common occurrence in the Niger Delta region (Campbell, 2015). Nigeria's state oil company and its joint venture partners have spent \$360 million on cleaning up the Niger Delta in the past two years (Bodo & Gimah, 2020). The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) claimed that 70 percent of all oil spills throughout the most recent five years was the after effect of sabotage on his facilities (Campbell, 2015). In 2015, SPDC compensated the people of Bodo after they had filed a case in the United Kingdom, where Shell is incorporated. Shell accepted responsibility for the oil spills of Bodo in 2008 and 2009; and \$83.4 million, 82% short of their original demand of \$454.9 million was paid to the people of Bodo in Ogoniland (Bodo, 2019). It was later reported that from this settlement, every resident who was 18 years and above received the sum of six hundred thousand naira (N600,000) as their share of the compensation money from SPDC (Bodo, 2019). Other communities (like Goi, Mogho and K-Dere) in Ogoniland are demanding compensation from SPDC for oil spills on their land and destruction of their livelihood, but SPDC has insisted that it will only compensate communities whose spills occurred as a result of operational failure and not the ones orchestrated by oil thieves (Bodo, 2019).

The consequences of some of these spills are already very conspicuous, as United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) discovered in their environmental assessment of Ogoniland in Rivers State that oil contamination had destroyed mangroves, polluted soil and groundwater, killed the fishes in the streams and rivers, and represented a genuine danger to general wellbeing (UNEP, 2011). As the people continue to cry out for the environmental restoration of their land, oil bunkering in the Niger Delta is still proceeding with greater intensity (Campbell, 2015; Bodo, 2019). The destruction of the Niger Delta ecosystem has decreased land arable for

cultivating and removed the only survivable source of livelihood for the farming and fishing people (Bodo & David, 2018). The people of the region are currently faced with several environmental challenges ranging from poor health conditions, inadequate housing facilities; contaminated drinking water sources, barren lands for agriculture, and dead rivers for fishing activities (David & Bodo, 2019). This study is exclusively based on secondary data that are sourced from textbooks, journals, articles, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and interviews. The data collected from all these sources are critically content and analyzed in line with the objective of this study.

Conceptual Clarification Oil Bunkering

Many people in Nigeria believed that the term, *Oil bunkering* denotes a serious criminal activity against the state. However, oil bunkering activities is a legal business that can be carried by anyone authorized by the government to do so. Oil bunkering is an international trade that is carried out in the high seas and oceans and practised between the oil-producing countries and the other coastal countries (Boniface & Samuel, 2016). Even in Nigeria, oil bunkering is a legitimate business activity that is been licensed by the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) since 1979. Over time the process was suspended due to abuses by non-licensed operators, and it was put on hold in the year 2000 by the federal government on the account of the subsidy on Petroleum products (Boniface & Samuel, 2016).

Illegal Oil Bunkering

Under the Nigerian constitution, all the natural resources in the soil within its territory belong to the federal government, and any form of oil extraction outside the framework of an agreement with the federal government is declared illegally. Thus, anyone into the extraction of crude oil must be fully licensed to do so, and specific crimes have also been created relating to damages to oil installation or siphoning of petroleum products. The term illegal oil bunkering refers to all acts involving oil theft, which usually includes the smuggling and diversion of oil (Campbell, 2015). Normally, a small group of welders is recruited to puncture the pipelines at night, preparing the way for the others to steal crude oil which is later transporting elsewhere to be refined and sold abroad (Ugwuanyi, 2013; Boris, 2015). The operations of illegal oil bunkering in Nigeria usually start from the taking of oil from pipelines or flow stations and also in some instances an extra crude oil can add to legitimate cargo that is not accounted for (Asuni, 2009; Boris, 2015). Illegal oil bunkering is simply an unauthorized loading of ships that emanate from all acts diversion and smuggling of crude oil (Boris, 2015).

Illegal oil bunkering is now a booming business in the Niger Delta. It involves the different local militant groups in creeks, commodity traders, military personnel, international businessmen, and some indigenous oil servicing companies (Olateju, 2013; Vidal, 2013; Ogunmade & Uwaezuoke, 2013; Bodo, 2019). The continuous successes of the activities of illegal oil bunkering are as a result of its sophisticated nature of the operation (Boris, 2015). Every player in this business has their peculiar roles. The local militant youths in the creeks handle the cutting, tapping of crude oil from the transported pipes and load it tankers and barges under the protection of the military, from where the international businessmen manage the marketing of the product and money laundering processes. Thereafter, the Nigerian oil businessmen link up with other international players from Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Russia, Eastern Europe, Australia, Netherlands, Lebanon, and France (Asuni, 2009; Katsouris & Sayne, 2013; Boris, 2015).

The cordial relationship between the operators of illegal oil bunkering has been reported to be a silence operation because of the involvement of government personnel (who are highly placed in the different arms of government), oil company staffs (of the Nigerian Petroleum Corporation, NNPC; Shell Petroleum Development Company, SPDC; etc.) and heavyweight businessmen within and outside Nigeria (Asuni, 2009; Olateju 2013; Katsouris & Sayne, 2013; Izeze, 2013). The continuous operation of illegal oil bunkering due to its high profitability has led to the massive devastation of the entire Niger Delta environment.

Niger Delta Region

The Niger Delta, as now characterized officially by the Nigerian government, reaches out over around 70,000 km² (27,000 sq mi) and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's territory mass. Generally, it comprises of present-day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States (Bodo & Gimah, 2020). In 2000, notwithstanding, Obasanjo's regime included Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo States in the region (Bodo & Gimah, 2020).

Nearly 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups including the Bini, Efik, Esan, Ibibio, Igbo, Annang, Yoruba, Oron, Ijaw, Ogba, Ikwerre, Abua/Odual, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Ukwuani, Kalabari, Okrika, Ogoni, Epie-Atissa and Obolo people, are among the occupants of the political Niger Delta, with over 250 unique vernaculars (Bodo & Gimah, 2020).

2. Causes of Illegal Oil Bunkering in Nigeria

Corruption and Bad Governance

The Nigerian oil industry has gained notoriety for illicitness (Katsouris & Sayne, 2013). Debasement and extortion are available all through the supply chain. The state-owned oil company (NNPC) is broadly observed as one of

the most politicized and traded off organizations in the oil business in the country (Katsouris & Sayne, 2013). The primary oil-producing states – Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Delta – have probably the most noteworthy planned livelihoods per capita in Nigeria, which could top those of the smaller West African nations, yet a great part of the revenue derived from oil (usually 13% benefits from the national oil revenue) is embezzled or moved to remote countries abroad (Katsouris & Sayne, 2013). Somewhere between the year 2003 and 2007, Nigeria's Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arraigned eight of the delta's nine state governors for financial misappropriation and embezzlement (Katsouris & Sayne, 2013).

For the past sixty years, the popular Trans Niger pipeline in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been transporting over 150,000 barrels of crude oil daily from wells in the different smaller terminals through the creeks and poverty-stricken villages of Ogoniland and Ogu-Bolo to the giant oil terminal in Bonny (Albert, Amaratunga & Haigh, 2019). This historical pipeline has been reported to be rusting with some spring leaks and coincidentally, it is also one of the most sabotaged pipelines in the world today. It has been reported that oil company contractors during the repair of some sections of the Trans Niger pipeline usually remove illegal taps on the line, while another group is seen to be installing pieces of equipment that allows huge amounts of oil to be siphoned straight into large barges where it would be taken out to sea to waiting tankers bound for Europe and the US (Albert, Amaratunga & Haigh, 2019). The oil theft in the Niger Delta is believed to be made possible with the collusion of the authorities and the military. Stealing of crude oil is not possible without the cover of the authorities as illegal oil bunkering in Nigeria has been severally regarded in literature as organised crime (Katsouris & Sayne, 2013).

Poverty and Unemployment

The people of the Niger Delta have complained over the years of total neglect by the operating oil companies and the government, as amidst the abundant resources on their land; they have been suffering from abject poverty and want. These conditions have prompted grassroots agitation – and opened entryways for composed wrongdoing. During the 2000s, Niger Delta activists and the governors of the oil-producing state government began to request a greater amount of the country's oil riches. The Niger Delta people were mainly into agricultural activities which are the cultivation of crops, rearing of animals and fishing. This practice made the people very prosperous in the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras as farm produce from the region like palm oil and cassava were exported abroad regularly. Sixty years after 1958, since the discovery of petroleum; the available farmlands for the cultivation of crops, the natural forest for the hunting of wild animals, and the rivers for fishing

have been destroyed by numerous oil spills, gas flaring, and forest fires leading to barren lands, habitat loss and dead rivers (Gimah & Bodo, 2019). With no land and rivers for agricultural activities which were the mainstay of the people, alternative means of surviving have become a necessity. Without any form of occupation to depend on, the lack of income and scarcity of farm products has become their reality. In a quest to survive, the only available and sustainable means of livelihood is the tapping or breaking of the oil pipeline.

Marginalisation and Neglect

The people of Niger Delta have alleged that the cities of Lagos and Abuja have been transformed from rural settlements to mega cities with the revenues from the Niger Delta, and yet the region where this enormous wealth is coming from, lacks basic social amenities (Bodo, 2019). The villages in the Niger Delta where oil exploration takes place, houses one the poorest people on earth, with no survivable means of income as the farmlands and the rivers have been massively destroyed (Bodo & David, 2018).

Put in an unexpected way, the unbridled exploration and misuse of crude oil and gas underneath the ground of the Niger Delta over the years has caused incredible and irredeemable biological pulverization of the Niger Delta region (Paki & Ebiefa, 2011). Oil-related ecological multidimensional issues that have made life excruciating for the people of the Niger Delta incorporated water and land contamination, the killing of vegetation, deforestation, displacement of human habitats because of oil installations and pipeline constructions (Paki & Ebiefa, 2011). Petroleum and gas conveying pipes are usually seen criss-crossing most local communities that are already riddled with abject poverty (Bodo & David, 2018). Loss of fauna and verdure environment, obliteration of mangrove and salt swamps, air contamination, and corrosive vain from oil and gas handling dissipation and flaring, industrial waste disposal, and a few others (Azaiki, 2007; Paki & Ebiefa, 2011). Oil has fashioned destitution, state savagery, and a perishing biological system (Okonta, 2005; Bodo, 2019). It has been reported that out of disappointment with the condition under which the people live, the young people in the Niger Delta have gotten more anxious than any other time in recent memory, yet youth anxiety has rather than redress, has put the state in savagery, constraint, concealment, and brutalization (Paki & Ebiefa, 2011; Bodo, 2019).

The untold hardship and sufferings dispensed to the whole Ogoni ethnic nationality during the 1990s climaxed when minority rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and other eight Ogoni was executed, and the intrusion and decimation of innocent lives and properties in Odi, Odioma, Ayakoroma, Gbaramatu realm, Oporoza and some Ogoni villages (Paki & Ebiefa, 2011). Subsequently, it isn't astonishing that the awareness of misuse, underestimation and debilitation has made the Niger Delta a district of

profound established disappointment, and consequently heightening oil disturbances in the area enveloped by militancy (Paki & Ebiefa, 2011). Previous scholars have asserted that the government of Nigeria is only interested in sharing revenue from oil and not in the development of the people in the region (Ikporukpo, 1996; Okoko and Nna, 1997; Ibaba, 2005; Bodo & David, 2018; Bodo, 2019), leading to destruction of the environment and human rights infringement (Okonta & Oronto, 2001; Aaron, 2006), the disappointment of corporate social duty for multinational oil companies (Ikelegbe, 2008, Aaron, 2008); high display of irresponsibility in administration (Peel, 2005; Inokoba & Imbua, 2008; Enweremadu, 2008); domineering legislative issues and imposing judgment like the case of Ken Saro Wiwa and the nine others (Isumonah, 2005) and the offensive laws that administer the oil business (Ibaba, 2005). Currently, all oil-producing community in the Niger Delta is being policed by the Nigerian military with people's rights to free movement and survival as a human being denied (Bodo, 2019; Bodo & David, 2018). It is a known fact that the Niger Delta region has become a domain of ceaseless crisis, destruction of properties, killing of innocent lives, and general frailty (Paki & Ebiefa, 2011; Bodo, 2019).

Weak institutional structure

Illegal oil bunkering runs with ease and freedom that one can conclude that there are no laws against its operation. Locally, no illegal oil bunkering lord or kingpin has been arrested and no foreign police or investigators have made any attempt in researching or indicting the oil bunkering cartel or their rings of operation. Multilateral international bodies are not dynamic in the territory either – INTERPOL affirmed, for instance, that it doesn't have criminal notification of oil theft beyond Nigeria's border. Nigeria has several regulations and laws on the environment and the general wellbeing of the people, but these laws are dormant and very ineffective especially when the supposed enforcer (the military) of such laws is part of those breaking the law. The government has been seen to be voiceless and indecisive; and no structure or system can compel people to do the right things. Illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta is succeeding as a lucrative business because the laws and institutions responsible for arresting the situation are ineffective or non-existence.

3. Presumed Benefits of Illegal Bunkering Activities

The Nigerian Navy in 2014, destroyed over 260 illegal refineries, burning their sites of operation and pouring out the stolen crude oil into the creeks, further causing serious environmental damage and wastage of natural resources at the different locations (Campbell, 2015). One would assume that this action by the military will end all forms of illegal bunkering and refineries

in the Niger Delta, but barely a month after illegal refineries pop up in other locations because of the high demand of the consumers of its products and the lucrative nature of the business (Campbell, 2015). It is believed that each mini-site of operation makes an annual profit of \$93,600 (N34,444,800) and the cost of settling such site costs only about \$4,700 (N1,729,600) at the rate of N368 to a \$1 (Campbell, 2015). The culmination of the profits from the different sites of operation with the associated losses on damages oil pipelines, installation sites, and pump stations running into billions of dollars (Dalby, 2014).

The petroleum products (petrol, diesel, or Kerosene) from illegal oil bunkering are usually referred to as *kpofire* and it is well appreciated by members of the local communities (Bodo, 2019). It has been reported that some operators of petrol filling stations prefer to buy their products from illegal oil bunkers than from the government refineries because it is cheaper, easy to get, and always available; compare to long queues, high cost, and most times, scarcity of petroleum products in the refineries (Bodo, 2019). In a research carried out on the oil impacted communities in Ogoniland in 2018, it was discovered that petroleum products (petrol, diesel, and Kerosene) from illegal oil bunkering were seen as a profitable business by those whose engage in the buying of these products from the refining sites (in jerry cans) and retailing them to the community dwellers in smaller bottles. Refined kerosene from government filling stations (like NNPC) are usually retailed in small bottles in the communities for 200 naira per bottle while the same bottle of kerosene from the illegal oil refining sites cost only 50 naira and it last longer compares to those from the government designated filling stations (Bodo, 2019).

From a community point of view, illegal oil bunkering has provided jobs for some persons (men, women, and youths) in Niger Delta communities and its products have alleviated the sufferings of the people and brought life back into the communities. The communities in the Niger Delta have always accused the multinational oil companies of polluting and destructing their environment with its operations of petroleum exploitation of their land. Despite the sophisticated equipment used by the multinational oil companies to carry out its operations, their operation still has some associated hazards (forest fires, oil spillages, and gas flaring) that end up polluted the environment beyond human survivable limits like the case of some areas in Ogoniland (UNEP, 2011). During illegal oil bunkering, crude oil (when not exported out) is refined using crude instruments and in the process, polluting the environment ten times more than the multinational oil companies (Bodo, 2019). Opinions by some members of the communities in the Niger Delta suggested that they have embraced illegal oil bunkering. This is an indication of the lack of understanding by some of the locals of the consequences of

petroleum pollution of their environment (Bodo, 2019; Bodo & David, 2018). However, previous studies indicate that the level of environmental awareness in the Niger Delta region is very high, despite the activities of a few (mainly militant youths) that constantly sabotage community and government efforts to clean up the polluted environment (Bodo, 2018; Bodo & Ukpong, 2018).

4. Consequences of Illegal Oil Bunkering

Nigeria has been labelled the most tormented country by oil robbers among her counterparts of Indonesia, Russia, Iraq, and Mexico (Boris, 2015). It has been reported that Nigeria is losing as much as US\$1.7-billion per month (Dalby, 2014; Boris, 2015). This tremendous misfortune contrasted with total oil theft of 5,000 to 10,000 barrels for every day and only 2,000 to 3,000 barrels for each day in Mexico and Indonesia respectively (Dalby, 2014; Boris, 2015). This whole system of illegal oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta is a clear indication of the various compromises of the government and exposes the illegality in the establishment of the oil industry (Garuba, 2012; Boris, 2015).

The challenge posed by illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is disturbing. Directly, Nigeria is losing more than 300,000 barrels of unrefined petroleum every day to oil robbers, pipeline vandalism, and related criminal indecencies in the nation's oil (Boris, 2015). The Nigerian economy is faced with a peculiar challenge with a financial crisis phenomenal among the oil-producing countries of the world and needs an urgent remedy to avoid total loss or collapse of the economy in the future.

Losses to the government

Oil robbery has been reported as the greatest danger to Nigeria's economy. The effect on the Nigerian economy has been so enormous, ranging from ecological debasement, decreases in revenue to the government, destruction of operational oil equipment, and terrible picture for the nation (Duru, 2013; Okere, 2013; Boris, 2015). Because of the constant pipeline vandalism and affirmation of power majeure, the monies shared by the three levels of government in Nigeria in 2013 were sporadic. In the year 2013 alone, it is being reported that Nigeria lost about N191 billion (\$1.23 billion) because of a drop in crude oil production, emerging from unending unrefined petroleum robbery and vandalism along the significant pipelines inside the Niger Delta, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) revealed (Mernyi, 2014; Boris, 2015). Expectedly, the fall between real generation and conjecture in the first quarter of 2013 brought about a drop in raw petroleum income of about \$1.23 billion (N191 billion) that ought to have been collected to the Federation Account (Mernyi, 2014).

The government has always proposed to make a return of 2.5 million barrels a day, however, it could only achieve 2 million barrels of crude oil daily due to loss of oil income to the oil robbers (Olateju, 2013; Boris, 2015). The budgetary arrangement for the country was adjusted due to the massive reduction in revenue in 2014 as only 23.3 billion dollars was spent compared to 2013 that 29.3 billion dollars were spent (Ogbeifun, 2014). With the current economic situation of the country where unemployment is at the highest level; illegal oil bunkering has also grown and gained popularity like no other times (Bodo & Gimah, 2020). Far back in 2013, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) revealed that the government spends \$12 billion every year on deferred production revenues and pipeline fixes, and have lost over \$11 billion (about N1.72 trillion) worth of oil income, however, it has been reported that the lost are even higher in recent times (Izuola, 2014; Bodo, 2019).

Losses to the multinational companies

The activities of the militant groups nearly incapacitated oil production in the Niger Delta. The contention is that the assaults by these militants on oil establishments, combined with the worthwhile and flourishing oil bunkering business in the Niger Delta principally ensured that oil theft continues, cutting the income profile of the Nigerian government. These oil criminals in the Niger Delta region have progressed their business to the other sectors of the economy. Julius Berger, one of the international construction companies in the nation has deserted the vast majority of its contract jobs because of the instances of grabbing and kidnapping of its staff by this same group of oil militants. Some of such deserted road construction includes; the Kaiama-Port Harcourt pivot of the East-West road, the Yenagoa-Oporoma road, Ogbia-Nembe-Brass road, Amassoma-Ekeremor road, among others (Agbo, 2009; Paki & Ebiefa, 2011).

Julius Berger hauled out of the agreement of the development of the immensely significant East-West road since militants continued capturing their labourers within this period. The organization claimed to have paid as much as around 430 million naira on ransom (Agbo, 2009; Paki & Ebiefa, 2011). The company also reported that aside from the fact that virtually all their realised profits were paid to the militants (*as matching ground fees*) and some of their staffs were killed; they have to shut down their business because the environment was no longer conducive for business.

Assaults on multinational oil company offices and their facilities have prompted the shutdowns and in some cases the total closure of the Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs), leading to losses of capital investment and manpower to these companies (Alohan, 2013; Asu, 2013; Boris, 2015). According to Boris (2015), The Shell Petroleum Development

Company (SPDC), on September 23, 2013, closed its Trans-Niger pipeline, which usually conveyed 150,000 barrels every day due to uncontrollable spills that resulted from illegal oil bunkering. The multinational oil companies have complained that they spend a huge amount of monies in repairing and fixing pipelines and remediation activities that are not as a resulted of their operational lapses but mainly from theft and sabotage of their facilities (Alawode & Ogunleye, 2013). The frequency of illegal oil bunkering causes continuous pipeline leaks. This kind of situation forces oil companies to shutdown crude oil production for crucial repairs to be carried (Sun, 2013). SPDC announced that the monies that would have been used for more a efficient and enhanced method of crude of production and processing, are channelled for repairing of its facilities; as a total of 189 crude theft points were repaired on the Trans Niger pipeline (TNP) and Nembe Creek Trunkline (NCTL) between January and September 2013 due to illegal oil bunkering (Bello, 2013; Boris, 2015).

Losses to the Niger Delta Communities

Illegal oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism produce numerous dangerous releases that cause enormous ecological destruction. Oil spillage causes massive destruction of the environment; it destroys farmlands and leads to habitat loss, in this way decreasing arable land for cultivating. Spills into conduits pulverize marine and oceanic life, vegetation, fauna, resort focuses, and bring about the contamination of consumable water (Badejo & Nwilo 2007; Boris, 2015; Gimah & Bodo, 2019). Illegal oil bunkering is liable for many of the oil spillages. Oil spills bring about groundwater contamination, the devastation of rural land, fishery and domesticated animals, and habitat loss (Boris, 2015; Gimah & Bodo, 2019). More awful, the unlawful petroleum processing plants that are scattered all over the creeks of the Niger Delta has destroyed the streams and rivers that are sources of drinking water to the people; resulting in many waterborne sicknesses and diseases among the people of the region (Ufford, 2013; Alawode & Ogunleye, 2013; David & Bodo, 2019; David, Bodo & Gimah, 2019). Indeed, farmland, fish lakes, waterways, and so forth, have been obliterated and rendered unviable for horticulture, fisheries, and aquaculture (Boris, 2015). Unfortunately, the destruction of the environment has left many of the people in the local communities jobless and hopeless as their primary source of livelihood (farming and fishing) no longer exists.

The harm brought about by oil criminals regularly causes the multinational oil companies to shut down their operations in the sites of continuous oil theft and pipeline vandalism. These actions aside from the more common implication of lowering the revenue accruing to the nation, thereby reducing expenditures and developments; can also bring immediate hardship

to the nation especially to the communities that do their businesses around these companies. Also, some communities in the Niger Delta have been burned down with many lives and properties from fires from illegal refineries. The assault on the Atlas Clove oil facility in Lagos by militants in 2009 clearly shows the capacity of these aggressors to wreak devastation on the Nigerian economy. These militants were known for setting deadlines for their demands which must be met. Niger Delta militants have always completed every arrangement of their assaults on the oil companies. An outstanding model is the execution of Operation Climate Change and Hurricane Barbarossa. Tropical Storm Barbarossa started on the 14th of September 2008, with several foot soldiers from various MEND bases in the Niger Delta coming together in solidarity to damage and carry out savage assaults on the oil pipelines. In this manner, the monstrous interruption of oil companies with assaults on their pipelines and siphoning crude from flow stations causes negative consequences on the host communities and economy of Nigeria.

5. Solutions to the Problems if Illegal Bunkering in the Niger Delta

The problems of illegal bunkering can be solved when the root causes of the problems are carefully looked into.

Environmental education and policy implementation

All the activities of an environmentally illiterate person on the environment will lead to destruction in one way or the other (Gimah & Bodo, 2019). Environmental education can help in solving the problem of illegal oil bunkering as it will create awareness of the consequences of such actions; giving a total understanding of the knowledge of the environment; imbibing the right attitudes; development of the necessary skills required for environmental sustainability. Environmental education enables an individual to take action that will sustain the environment. It makes people to be environmentally friendly and choose not to act or engage in any activity that will destroy the environment. Also, environmental education can guide policy makers on the right policies that can save the environment. Strategies on the implementation of the policies and its achievement can also be part of environmental education (Gimah & Bodo, 2019). Through environmental education, all the stakeholders involved in the policy making and implementation will understand that any failure in any part of the policy will affect us today and tomorrow.

Monitoring of the whole process of oil exploration by the government

Nigeria government can learn from the United States of America on how to manage the crisis between the Multinational oil companies and the people of Niger Delta. One case that deserves commendation and applauds to

the US government was the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. At roughly 7:45 pm CDT, on April 20, 2010, high-pressure methane gas from the well expanded into the marine riser and rose into the drilling rig, where it ignited and exploded, engulfing the entire platform. The oil spill was found on the evening of April 22, 2010, when a huge oil spill started to spread at the previous rig site (Krauss, Broder & Calmes, 2010). The oil flowed for 87 days. The total volume of spilled oil was approximately 4.9 million barrels (210 million US gal; 780,000 m³) with giving or take 10% uncertainty, including oil that was collected, making it the world's biggest unplanned oil spill (Henry, 2010).

Unlike the *conscious neglect* of the massive ecological destruction of Ogoniland by the government institutions concern; the United States government immediately carried out numerous investigations to find out the reasons for the blast and record-breaking spill. By September, 2011; the U.S. Government report, highlighted flawed concrete on the well, blaming generally BP, and also the rig administrator Transocean and contractor Halliburton (BOEMRE, 2011). Before this report, a White House commission likewise accused BP and its accomplices for a progression of cost-cutting choices and a lacking security framework, yet additionally inferred that the spill came about because of fundamental underlying drivers and missing huge change in both industry practices and government approaches, may well recur (Krauss & Schwartz, 2012).

In the face of this development, in November 2012, BP and the United States Department of Justice settled federal criminal accusations, with BP confessing to 11 counts of murder, two offenses, and a felony count of deceiving Congress. BP likewise consented to four years of government checking of its wellbeing practices and morals, and the Environmental Protection Agency declared that BP would be briefly restricted from new agreements with the US government. BP and the Department of Justice consented to a record-setting \$4.525 billion in fines and other payments (Goldenberg & Macalister, 2012; Muskal, 2013;). As of 2018, cleanup costs, charges and punishments had cost the organization more than \$65 billion (Bouso, 2018; Ward, 2018). In September 2014, a U.S. District Court judge decided that BP was answerable for the oil spill because of its gross carelessness and foolish conduct (Robertson & Krauss, 2014). In July 2015, BP consented to pay \$18.7 billion in fines, the biggest corporate settlement in United States history (Robertson & Krauss, 2014).

It is therefore inconceivable that Nigeria's legislature could overlook the challenges posed by illegal oil bunkering for such a long time. 95% of Nigeria's outside trade originates from the oil that is taken from the Niger Delta (Mba, 2010). The U.S. produces 8 million barrels of oil every day and the oil and gas industry employs 9.6 million Americans (Mba, 2010). By relative, since Nigeria produces approximately 2.2 million barrels of oil every

day, our oil and gas industry ought to furnish Nigerians with at least 2.2 million jobs. Unlike the situation in Nigeria, The Deep water oil spills brought more opportunities for the locals, as the U.S. government under the Obama administration asked the culprit, BP to put aside \$20 billion to settle claims of the people whose lives have been affected by the spill (Mba, 2010). A huge number of residents in and around the Gulf locale were paid what they would have earned because of their loss of livelihood. Several thousand others were given jobs to tidy up the sea shores. Several hundred ships were sent to manage the debacle, and BP was on the airwaves regular saying 'sorry' to the individuals of the Gulf Coast and the entire world (Mba, 2010). For over 50 years of oil exploration in Nigeria, not a single oil company that works in the dirtied terrains of the Nigerian Niger Delta has ever apologized or made a continued remuneration plan for the individuals of Niger Delta (Mba, 2010).

Illegal oil bunkering can be eradicated through intense monitoring and follow-up of all the operations of oil exploration. If the government is fully involved in all processes of oil lifting and distribution, every loop holes can be detected.

Eradication of corruption from the petroleum industry

Corruption is deeply rooted in Nigeria's petroleum industry; and bribing and massive looting have become the order of the day. For example, in 2008, Albert Jackson Stanley of Kellogg, Brown and Root, a US oil service company, pled guilty to paying around US\$180 million in bribes to NNPC, the Petroleum Ministry, and other government officials to secure four contracts, worth over US\$ 6 billion to build liquefied natural gas facilities. It has been reported that some contractors in the oil business use fake consultancy firms to channel payments to the government and manipulate their own company's financial systems to acquire extra cash and send bribes to specific government representatives at positions of authority and influence (Sansoni, 2003).

Aside from collecting bribes, some government officials still benefit from the profits realised from awarded contracts and always ensuring that only companies where they have a high financial stake get the job (Sansoni, 2003). In some cases, these government officials can give preference to companies owned by their allies, and still benefit from the business deal or the contract offered. It is believed that illegal oil bunkering has been successful in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria because both the government and oil companies are complicit in bunkering activities. According to Bodo (2019), every illegal bunkering activity in the Niger Delta is often supervised by a powerful figure, and cases of successful well-executed pipeline sabotage are carried out with the help of some oil company personnel and government informant (Huillery, 2007). Illegal oil bunkering has inflicted serious financial cost and lowers the

amount of crude Nigeria exports, thereby reducing the revenues which accrue to the state (Gullies, 2009). Foreign investors are discouraged from investing in onshore exploration and production because of the security risks and damage to equipment in the Niger Delta (Gullies, 2009). Truthfully, illegal oil bunkering only creates more problems for the government as it provides a steady stream of funding for the militancy movements and corrupt syndicates responsible for destabilising the Delta region (Gullies, 2009).

Oil-related corruption causes serious harm to the nation by constantly increasing the amount of wealth available through illicit means. The government claims to be making serious efforts to eradicate illegal oil bunkering from the creeks of the Niger Delta but a perfectly managed oil sector will do little to further national development if the revenues accruing to the state are mismanaged or lost to corruption. Government oil managing institutions like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), NNPC, and other related institutions have been accused of serious fraud (Gullies, 2009; Bodo & Gimah, 2020). The Government of Nigeria and multinational oil companies can decide to end illegal oil bunkering if they can eradicate corruption from among themselves.

Creation of job opportunities for the youths in the Niger Delta region

It is no longer news that the majority of the youths in the Niger Delta region have no jobs, as a result of the destruction of their farmlands and rivers during oil exploration. Thousands of peaceful university graduates in the region have no job placement as every few available opportunities are always been for the armed militants or freedom fighters. Some have even alleged that aside from the abject poverty that is common among the people, over 90% of employable youths in the region are unemployed. The government had in the past channelled billions of naira into state government accounts (especially through 13% oil derivation) and institutions (like the NDDC, Ministry of Niger Delta, etc.) to develop the region and alleviate the suffering of the people; however, few persons in the region end up becoming super-rich as the sufferings of the people gets more severe. Even the popular presidential amnesty programme only offered few scholarships, training, and jobs for armed militants; while the leaders of the struggle were offered massive contracts running into millions of US dollars. The fact is that majority of the victims (the poor women and children, fishermen, and farmers in the villages) of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta has not been reached or benefited from the oil of their land (Bodo, 2019). The government of Nigeria must consciously come up with programmes that can massively engage the Niger Delta youths without any form of bias, irrespectively of their educational qualification or social status. The NPOWER programme that

temporarily engages 500,000 unemployed youths (out of the over 11 million unemployed youths) in Nigeria, was commendable because of the screening and selection process. The government can employ the same strategy for the Niger Delta youths. If the youths of Niger Delta are gainfully employed, the government can make more profit from the business in the region as illegal oil bunkering will automatically die out of the system.

Conclusion

Illegal oil bunkering is now a booming business in Nigeria with some highly placed members in government institutions, multinational oil companies, and the Niger Delta communities fully involved in its operation. Illegal oil bunkering is capable of incapacitating the economy of Nigeria overtime, as the country is solely dependent on the revenues from petroleum for its daily expenditures. The government of Nigeria can end the operation of illegal oil bunkering by eradicating corruption and the usual attitude of financial mismanagement from its system; consciously develop the oil-bearing communities, and without any bias, employ massively the youths in the Niger Delta region. Illegal oil bunkering is not a problem that is difficult to solve, rather the unwillingness of the government officials and their allies to let go of this corrupt business remains the crux of the matter. The government of Nigeria has the full capacity and the will-power to end all forms of corruption and the operation of illegal oil bunkering in the oil industry, but such actions are also delayed or dragged or politicised because of the selfish interest of a few. Thus, one can conclude that illegal oil bunkering is operational in Nigeria because the government of the day benefits from its operation.

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