ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND THE DILEMMA OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

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ABSTRACT

The study takes a critical look at the concept of environmental security in the light of massive environmental degradation and damage in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where the bulk of the nation's wealth is derived. It examines the concept of sustainable development and uses it as a yardstick in measuring the activities of operating oil Multinational Corporations in the region. Using historical method of analysis, this study observes that most internal conflicts in the country today have strong environmental root and that the inability of the government to address such environmental problems have had great effects on the security problem currently facing the Nigerian State today. The study therefore recommends that there is the need for government to begin seeing environmental degradation in more conventional terms that is, in conventional political instability as environmental degradation is the basis of many insecurity problems besetting the country today. This will enable it to use the existing security systems to monitor and manage environmental resources thereby reducing tension in the polity

Keywords: Environmental Degradation, Environmental Security, Sustainable Development, Conflicts, Oil Multinational Corporations.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the environment is increasingly becoming a focus and great concern to world leaders, environmentalists, stakeholders, and the general public. Such great concern has led to the organization of high profile conferences and summits geared towards addressing the horrifying implication of the unsustainable use of the world natural resources. This change of attitude can be adduced to a number of factors: Firstly, humans are increasingly realizing that threats from environmentally induced problems are as serious as nuclear threats if not more serious. Secondly they are also beginning to realize that the conventional conceptualization of security which equates it with military induced threats is fast becoming dependent on the environment. Hence there is need to broaden our scope of security to include environmental related issues as these have been found to be the underlying causes of most regional conflicts that eventually graduates to be a global problem. As a dependent variable, the classical definition of security which posits military perspective alone is experiencing demise as greater emphasis is now being placed on the environment. Thirdly, the degradation of the environment as one functional cause of acrimonious relationship between states can no longer be ignore by the comity of States. This is because, environmental issues like global warming, climate change, desertification, and trans-boundary pollution affects not just the polluter but also neighboring states and beyond.

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The significant role now played by the environment was aptly captured by Aluko (2004) when he wrote, *The issue of the environment is today perceived more than just a narrow ecological problem of how to ensure a symbiotic and congruent interface between man and his environment; its inner core has political, developmental, sociological and scientific ramifications, all of which are anchored to the concept of sustainable development*

However, it was not until Rachael Carson's book titled "Silent Spring" published in 1962 which tends to show the disastrous effect of DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, is a synthetic organic compound introduced in the 1940s and used as an insecticide but was banned in the USA following scientific proof of its disastrous effect on human and plant life) on plants that greater concern unequalled by earlier efforts was shown by policy makers in addressing environmental issues (Green, 2002). It was these realizations that led to the well publicized and attended mega conferences like the Stockholm Conference of 1972, the Rio de Janeiro Conference of 1992, the New York Conference of 1997 and the Johannesburg Conference of 2002. In fact since 1992 there have been greater attempt to situate the concept of sustainable development as a driving force in achieving balance between resource exploitation and development. There have also been smaller meetings and summits aimed at finding solutions to specific environmental problems.

In Nigeria Niger Delta region, the gloomy picture of poverty, inequality, and corruption is fast been tied to natural resource extraction or non extraction or even as a result of environmental injustice. In recent years especially in the region, conflicts and violence have erupted, directed against the oil companies and the Federal Government. These conflicts have predictably escalated to other parts of the country where oil exploitation is not in contention. More importantly the security dilemma it has caused has hampered and continues to hamper development in the country as a whole. This vicious circle of poverty caused first by the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources which has destroyed the economic livelihood of the people of the region and secondly by conflicts and instability that it has helped to generate has now become problematic to our independent national leaders as they seem to be in the dark as to how best to tackle the menace. In fact the failure to address the economic aspirations of the masses have led to alternate state groups competing effectively against government hegemonic hold on its legitimate use of force. It is in this light that this paper should be understood.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Niger Delta region is one of the poorest and most threatened regions in the world, though paradoxically it is also one of the richest regions in terms of natural resources. In fact, aside oil the region can boost of other resources like agriculture, steel, tin, rubber, palm produce and many more. However the neglect of these other resources which following the discovering of crude oil in commercial quantity in the region has witnessed the un-development of these other resources and the emergence of a monocultural economy anchored on the aggressive exploitation of oil. While the country as a whole has benefited immensely from petro-dollars as it continues to be the major source of government revenue,

it has also created negative externalities on the environment. Consequently, as the region inhabitants find themselves at the mercy of these giant oil companies and their activities which have eroded their means of livelihood as their lands, rivers and air continue to be under attack, it has generated ill feelings and anomie attitude among the people. Predictably, various violent means of expressing the anger felt has being employed. This in turn has led to instability which has further hampered economic growth and development. This paper therefore takes a critical and systematic look at environmental degradation and its implication on environmental security within the context of sustainable development. In other words, how does the unsustainable exploitation of crude oil which degrades the environment impact gravely on the nation's environmental security?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this paper is to assess the impact of environmental degradation on environmental security in Nigeria and specifically in the Niger Delta region. Specifically, its aim will also include the following:

i. To assess the level of Environmental degradation in Niger Delta.
ii. To establish a linkage between environmental degradation and insecurity in the Niger Delta region
iii. To assess the role of Oil Multinational Corporations (OMNCs) activities towards sustainable development in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The intense focus on environmental threats capability to adversely affect the security of a State, Region, or the International System as a whole can best be explained using the neoliberal theory. Neoliberalism, a perspective that accounts for the way international institutions promote global change, cooperation, peace, and prosperity, through collective reform approaches (Kegley and Wittkopf, 2004), was a departure from the realist theory and one that equate nuclear wars and holocaust and other forms of violence such as terrorism which have for a very long time threatened the continued survival of the earth with National Security, often defined in conventional terms. According to Kegley and Wittkopf (2004), Neoliberalism suggests that threats to National Security should be define as actions that reduce the quality of life for a country's inhabitants. This is in line with the scarcity of poverty which predicts that future international wars will likely be caused by resource scarcity-lack or access to food water and oil-rather than overt military challenges. This unconventional viewpoint espoused by neoliberal scholars has led to much debate on the environment as a determinant to most conflicts engulfing our global world. The resulting concept, *Environmental Security* does according to Kegley and Wittkopf (2004), broaden the definition of national security, helping to push our vision beyond borders and their protection. It also recognized that threats such as global warming, ozone depletion, and the loss of tropical forests and marine habitats can threaten the future of humankind as mush as the threats of nuclear annihilation. The neoliberals view is not state-centric as state struggle is not a primary unit of focus in the international scene. However as correctly asserted by Kegley and Wittkopf (2004), compelling as this unconventional viewpoint may be, security continues to

be studied primarily from a state-centric ecopolitical perspective. This is true in Nigeria where environmental related issues are largely ignore as being capable of disrupting the security of the state. Hence over the years the Nigerian government has been adamant in addressing this malaise.

Sustainable Development: A Conceptual Framework

The concept of sustainable development is a notion around which significant expectations regarding environmental conduct have begun to stabilize. The Rio de Janeiro conference of 1992 and the Johannesburg 2002, 'Earth Summit' promote strategies to fully integrate the relationship between environment and development. The initiative is a testimony to the currency of sustainable development in a global polity. The issue of sustainable development is now seen as the problem that is confronting humanity. Sustainable development is a process in which the natural resource base is not allowed to deteriorate, emphasizing the hitherto unappreciated role of the environmental quality and environmental inputs in the process of raising real income and quality lifestyle. World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 2000:43). The definition contains within it two key concepts namely the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world poor, to which overriding priority should be given and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social environments ability to meet present and future needs. WCED' thesis of sustainable development posits that the present generation has been reckless and wasteful both in its exploitation and use of natural resources by pursuing a series of socio-economic and industrial policies which endanger global environmental security. It urged governments to pursue a new developmental strategy that can both ensure continued economic growth and ecological stability with less exploitation and use of natural resources.

Sustainable development involves three primary factors: economic, social and environment. An economically sustainable system must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis and maintain manageable economy without jeopardizing sectoral balances of economic activities of the country. Environmentally sustainable system must maintain a stable resource base, avoiding over exploitation of renewable resource systems or environmental sink functions and depleting non-renewable resources only to the extent that investment is made in adequate substitutes. This includes maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric stability and other ecosystem functions not ordinarily classified as economic resources. The last factor must achieve distributional equity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity and political accountability, transparency and participation. This must be with dynamic understanding of human rights that is developing very rapidly. For instance, the rights to life and liberty have been recognized and they include a healthy environment and development.

Understanding the Niger Delta Area and Environmental Security

The Niger Delta is located in the south-south of Nigeria and cover some 85,000 square kilometers. It is Africa largest belt and wetland and many studies have placed it as the third largest mangrove forest in the world, a third of which is wetland, (Onosode, 1997). The core Niger Delta comprises Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers and Akwa Ibom states with pitches in Abia, Cross River and Edo states (Orubu, 1999). However today, it has been politically define to include Imo State and Ondo state. This definition is political because since it equates oil producing states with the Niger Delta, its purpose is purely for administrative reasons. The Niger Delta apart from its Deltaic features which makes efforts at development difficult as has been recognized by various set up commissions (Willink Commission of 1958), it is also very rich in natural resources of which oil and gas is the most prominent. According to Ogisi et al (2002), oil plays a significant role as the nations treasure base and sustainer of the Nigerian economy. The petroleum sector generates over 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. The occupation of the Niger Delta people before the discovery of oil has been fishing, hunting and farming. For years before the advent of oil, these activities have served as the economic lifeline for the majority of its people. However since oil exploration started, the people economic livelihood and productive activities has been destroyed. This has thus engendered social activism directed against the perceived source of their problems, namely the oil multinational corporations and constituted authorities.

According to Buhari (2009);

The region is a contiguous region of contradiction and painful contrast, where daily the issue of poverty and development, oil and power politics, inter-ethnic harmony and communal eruption, wealth and its lack, and an awe-inspiring ring of nature's flora and fauna coexist with the excesses of ecological waste and environmental degradation.

This apt description of the daily expectations of the people of the Niger Delta region and the consequent attacks on their source of livelihood has had reverberating effects on not just the region as this paper will show, but the entire Nigerian State. The Niger Delta region is also home to 300 oil fields, 51,284 oil wells, ten oil and gas plants, and massive liquefied natural gas. It is also one of the 20 major deltas in the world and the richest in terms of oil and gas reserves (Fagbadebo and Akinola, 2010). Geographically, the Niger Delta Basin play host to large number of rivers and water ways. According to Fagbadebo and Akinola, (2010), it is this geographic feature that makes the development of physical infrastructure challenging and capital intensive. The fact that a substantial part of the region is permanently waterlogged all year round does not help issues.

Environmental Security

As the conventional conceptualization of security continues to experience demise, environmental related security problems have begun occupying top agenda on the priority list of government across borders. Environmental issues have always constituted problems no doubt but certain factors have relegated it to the background. According to Macdonald (1995:1),

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Although over the centuries nations have often battled to secure natural resources, only relatively recently have national leaders begun to recognize the importance of environmental degradation as a politically destabilizing factor.

Thus issues like deforestation and desertification, the result of an ever increasing population in search of land for food and energy, which logically leads to the destruction of the food generating capacity of rural areas and intensifies resource competition and accelerates the movement of people to urban centres, fueling social upheaval, should as a matter of fact enter into the conventional analysis of political instability. However, if environmental induced security problem have for centuries bedeviled stability and development, why has it not feature prominently until recently in government's discourse? Certain factors might be responsible.

Firstly, colonialism. Until the intellectual attacks by the colonized people, colonialism apologist sees it more as a civilization mission whose objective was to assist the uncivilized get integrated and civilized. Its economic and environmental related pursuit was down played. This natural resource extraction was not positioned as the reasons why the developed west decides to invade the developing countries in Asia, Latin American and Africa. Security was thus defined as the maintenance of law and order as Africans were considered as barbaric. Another factor could be adduced to the arms race that took place during the cold war era between the USSR and USA. The increasing definition of security in military terms took hold during this era as the world stood and watch these two countries dictates the pace of foreign policy in the entire globe. According to Igun (2010:3) the cold war security paradigms fail to capture emergent security dynamics that have moved away from state centre conceptualization to new notions of security focused on human dimensions. This increasing security problem faced by the entire human race, unleashed as part of globalization is today the greatest threat to humanity especially in the Southern hemisphere (the Third World Nations) (Kuna, 2003:162 cited in Igun 2010:3). Hence Pinar et al (2002) cited in Kuna (2003) and Igun (2010) asserted that globalization widens the level of human insecurity in the southern hemisphere by reinforcing and widening economic, food, health, environmental, personnel, community, and political insecurity. It exposes the bulk of the world's population not only the sudden disruptions in patterns of daily life but also degrades their safety from basic things such as hunger, disease and repression.

This increasing threat from global warming, climate change, trans-boundary pollution and desertification has over the years change the perception of leaders and today world has witness greater emphasis on environmental related security dilemma. Ejumudo (2010) define environmental security as the relationship between development and security concerns and the natural environment. He went on to say that it is the proactive minimization of anthropogenic threats to the functional integrity of the biosphere and thus to its independent human component positioning the linkages between the environmental conditions and security interests. Some of the concerns address under environmental security is:
- The adverse impacts of human activities on the environment.

- The direct and indirect impacts or effects of various forms of environmental change (especially scarcity and degradation) which may be natural or human generated.
- The insecurity of individuals and groups due to environmental change such as water scarcity, air pollution, global warming etc (Ejumudo, 2010:109). In the view of Chalecki (2003) environmental security reflects the ability of a nation or a society to withstand environmental assets scarcity, environmental related tensions or conflicts.

Diagram 1
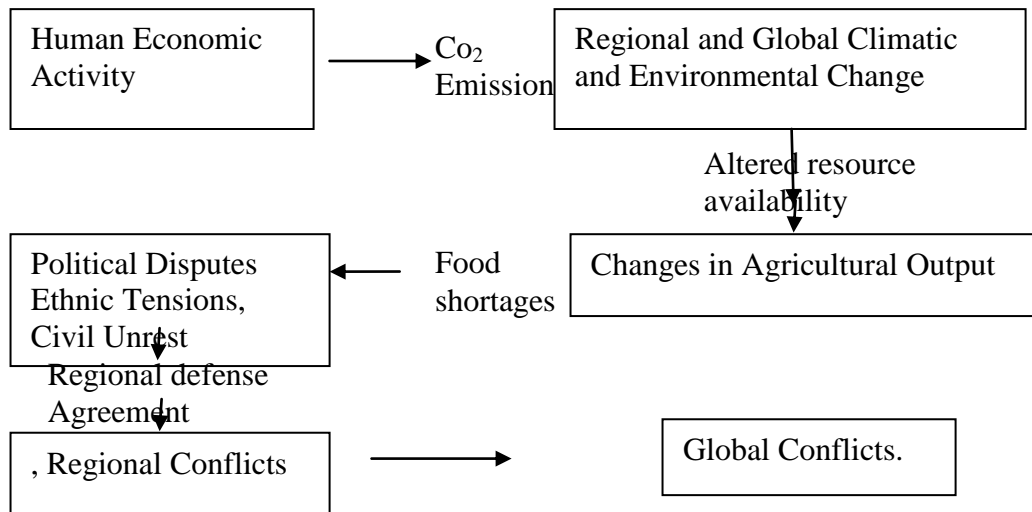
Source: Chalecki (2003)

The diagram 1 shows the potentials of human economic activity leading to regional and global conflicts especially as the emission of dangerous gases into the atmosphere (environmental degradation) results in changes in agriculture output and unavailability of resources ultimately occasioning food shortages.

Recognizing the potentials of negative environmental externalities turning into full scale warfare, Kegley and Wittkopf (2004) sees environmental security as a useful concept which broadens the definitions of national security, pushing on visions beyond borders and their protection recognition has threat by such phenomena as global warming, ozone layer depletion and the loss of tropical forest and marine habitant can threaten the future of human kind just as much as can the threat of nuclear annihilation. An appreciation of this insight can be further enhanced, if we consider the fact that directly or indirectly, environmental related factors (not necessarily environmental degradation as it has been observed that environmental injustice can also play a major role in this regard) do play significant role in disputes and violent conflicts. Instances abound: the conflict between Nigeria and Chad over the lake Chad the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroun over the Bakassi Peninsula; India and Pakistan over the Indus; Iran and Afghanistan on the slowed sister Basin wetlands; between Turkey, Syria and Iraq over the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates

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and so on. In relation to assess to water, according to Myers (2004) quoted in Osawe and Ibedanjo (2010)

At least 261 of the world's major rivers are shared, with 176 flowing through four or more countries. Their river Basins account for more than 45% of the earth land surface, they account for 60% of the world's fresh water supply and they supply nearly 40% of the world's population with water for domestic use, agriculture, hydro power and other Salient purposes. As many as 80 countries with rarely three billion people or two fifths of the world's population already suffer serious water deficits. During the past half century there have been more than 450 water related disputes of hostiles sorts and on 37 occasions rival countries have fired shots blown up a claim, or undertaken some other form of violent action.

Environmental Degradation and environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta Region

The role of oil multinational corporations within the framework of sustainable development has been very contentious, especially in developing economies. In the Niger Delta region where Shell and other multinationals operate in the exploitation and exploration of crude oil, the relationship between oil companies and host communities has been very frosty. In this section of the paper the concentrating is more on Shell. They are the most visible and have the largest operations in the entire region. Shell started its oil operation in 1958 when oil was struck in Oloibiri now in Bayelsa state. While Shell have always claimed that it carried out its operations in accordance with the highest environmental standards, the fact still remains that Shell has greatly affected environmental quality and so had contributed immensely to the process of environmental deterioration in Nigeria. In fact the UN committee on economic, social and cultural rights (1998) noted with alarm the extent of the devastation that oil exploration has done to the environment and quality of life in areas such as Ogoni land where oil has been discovered and extracted without regard to the health and well being of the people and the environment. In fact, the devastation of the land and shell compensation payment for its environmental degradation is currently an issue on the international media.

Practices like gas flaring, oil spills and deforestation have become the defining features of Shell's and other oil companies operating in the region as there have been no contentious efforts on the part of these companies to stop it. A frequent occurrence in the Niger Delta is the practice of gas flaring, according to Shnnsato (2005) quoted in Abdul-Gafaru (2006:16), in the year 2000, 95% of extracted natural gas was flared in Ogoni land, a section of the Niger Delta, compared to a mere 0.4% flared in the entire US. This is an unacceptable practice given the damage of gas flaring to the natural environment. According to Abdul-Gafaru (2006), gas flaring contributes to acid rain which poisons potable water, stunts crop growth and damages the eco-systems. Also, the extremely high levels of carbon dioxide and methane gases that are released into the atmosphere are a significant source of global warming. Environmentalists are largely of the opinion that this practice continues unabated because it is considered the cheapest alternative. It is in this vein that we should understand oil companies' readiness to pay the monetary penalties for flaring gas rather than make any genuine efforts to stop the flaring of gas (Evoh 2002). Oil spills is another environmental

hazard which has become a frequent sight in the communities where oil is exploited. According to Cayford (1996:183) quoted in Abdul-Gafaru (2006)40% of all Shells oil spills between 1982 and 1992 occurred in the Niger belt despite the fact that Shell drilled for oil in twenty eight different countries during the same period. Of course Shell has always been quick to blame the occurrence of oil spills to acts of pipeline vandalism and saboteur. However, a sizeable amount of oil spills has also been adduced to corrosive pipelines, blow-outs and carelessness on the part of these companies (Natufe 2001).

A significant effect of oil spills is the destruction of mangrove forest, an admirable and attractive sight in the Niger Delta region. The mangrove forests play so great a role in the region. It is a major carbon sink, and a major source of soil stability. However, the constant attack of these mangrove forests through oil toxicity due to Shell operations has made it very difficult for Nigeria mangrove forests to survive. According to Abdul-Gafaru (2006) the increasing oil leaks have largely destroyed the breathing roots of the mangroves, killing parts of the forest. Given the fact that the mangroves essentially provide the foundation upon which the belts exist, its destruction further results in erosion as the roots no longer hold the delta silt in place (Abdul-Gafaru 2006). There is also the contamination of water bodies by gas flaring and oil spills. Lakes, streams, rivers and even deep seas have all been contaminated as a result of these practices. Thus, even if the oil does not directly spill into water sources, rain washes the pollution into the water. Deforestation, which occurs as a result of government and multinationals activities such as road development, arable farming and land clearing for pasture has been notoriously high in the country. In fact Nigeria has the highest rate of deforestation in the world. Deforestation has a linkage with the unorthodox flaring of gases into the atmosphere. The heavy reliance of the most vulnerable groups in the country (women and children) on fire woods for cooking in the absence of cooking gas makes any hope of reducing the rate of deforestation a mirage. The impact of deforestation on climate change is high as it is estimated that it does contribute over 20% to climate change globally (Yahaya, 2009). The Niger Delta region continues to experience the effect of climate change on their environment. For instance, coaster erosion, flooding, desertification, change in rainfall pattern and change in vegetation.

Government Positions and Response towards Oil and Gas Exploration in the Niger Delta Region
Government is perceived and understood to be a necessary prerequisite for an orderly society. According to liberal conception it acts as an unbiased umpire or mediator in conflicts situation. It must be seen to be objective in handling state matters and settling disputes among its subjects or citizenry. However in real life situation this is not really the case especially in Third World economy where functionaries of state apparatus or those, the Marxists would aptly refer to as the petit bourgeoisie, have vested interest in the economic activities of the state. It is in this sense the State becomes the executive committee of the bourgeoisie. In Nigeria and especially in the Niger Delta region, governmental policies towards the oil sector have been geared primarily to reflect and ensure their economic interest which coincides with the economic interest of the oil companies. Ejumudo (2010) articulates correctly the economic interest of the government response through their various

policies dictating their actions towards the exploration and exploitation of oil. These policies which to a very large extent explain their insensitivity towards the plight of the inhabitant of the region can be collapse into four factors according to Ejumodo (2010) namely; legal constitutional, operational, fiscal and infrastructure. This are briefly discuss below.

- **Legal/Constitutional:** According to Ejumudo (2010:111), the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Decree of 1978 which gave unlimited power to the Federal Government were designed to

Strengthen the instrument of oppression, suppression, marginalization, dispossession, deprivation, and disempowerment of the Niger Delta people by the state in collaboration with its allies, the multinational oil corporations and local bourgeoisie".

Though the Land Use Decree has vested ownership of land to the state and not the Federal Government per se, the gradual erosion of federalism in Nigeria under military rule made the states increasingly subordinates and not coordinates to the Federal Government. The petroleum act of 1969 was perceived as even more arbitrary. As Ejumudo (2010:111) rightly asserted, it complement the Land Use Decree. The Petroleum Act provides for the exploration of petroleum from the territorial waters and continental shelf of Nigeria and vests the ownership of, and all onshore and off-shore revenue from petroleum resources in the Federal Government. The dictatorial nature of this Act became clearer when juxtaposed with the way the Northern and Western part of the country were treated when agriculture was the main stay of Nigeria economy. Also the petroleum industry, been an extractive industry, its negative effects on the environment and productive activities like farming, fishing and hunting are pervasive. In fact the insecurity that greeted the Niger Delta region and stunted economic growth and development was actually violent demands based on the arbitrary nature of the laws.

Operational: the legal/constitutional dimension of government attitude towards oil exploration did not only establish or create the environment which has continue to breed distrust and insecurity in the region, but it has also set the stage for the operational menace in which the region has been engulfed (Ejumudo, 2008). The fact that given such foundational backup, oil companies did not see themselves answerable to the host communities, hence, with great impunity and indifferent attitude they destroy the soil, water, vegetable, crops and forests of the people without blinking an eyelid cushioned under pretentious promises through their operational activities. Thus, gas flaring continues to cause unbearable pain to the people economically, socially, and physically. It is in this vein that Ejumudo (2010:112) concludes that

This operational dimension engendered and instigated largely by the foundational legal/constitutional dimension of the Niger Delta crises has generated a lot tension, piracy, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, illegal bunkering, violence and the like.

In short it has engendered insecurity caused by environmental problems that has proceeded beyond the shores of the Niger Delta region and continues to manifest in places where the Niger delta question is not an issue.

Fiscal: According to Kolawole (2011), fiscal federalism means "each component of the federation should exercise greater powers over the revenue generated by its internal economy". The argument surrounding the fiscal fiasco is which of the government (federal or states) has the right for instance to collect VAT or Corporate Tax? The answer regarding this question is vexed, varied, and has now become so intense that it is now considered capable of distorting the security of the nation. The Niger Delta inhabitants strongly believe that what they are witnessing regarding the fiscal issue is a gang-up by the majority ethnic groups against the minority. This is because fiscal policies were very much in place before the discovery of oil. Hence, Kolawole (2011) believes that it was the overwhelming inflow of petro-dollars that distorted the fiscal structure of the Nigerian federation, and this has constituted a major basis of the resource control quest and the security problem in the region.

Infrastructure: lack of infrastructure, social amenities, and social services characterized the entire Niger Delta region in spite of its huge oil wealth which the entire country depends upon. However, despite various government commitments to solve the issue of development and provision of functional infrastructure, through the setting up of interventionist agency like Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB), Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and so on, the region is still largely underdeveloped in comparison to other zones in the country. These goes to show that there have been no genuine effort on the part of the government to resolve the problem of poverty, unemployment, food scarcity, among others which feature prominently in the Niger Delta The above exposition shows that the various policies of the Federal Government have been extremely harsh to the people of the region thereby engendering acrimonious relationship between the people and Oil Multinational Corporations on the one hand and the federal government on the other hand. A related development from the above policies undertaken by the federal government was the subsequent militarization of the region. Nnoli (2000) for instance, strongly believes that globalization has greatly increased the power of the oil multinationals. These have made the State subordinate to the oil companies for the realization of its share of the surplus accruing from transnational oil exploits. In fact a report by human right organizations shows that in the oil producing areas of the country, people were often brutalized by agents of the State for protesting or raising their grievances against the oil companies.

All of these have combined to make the Niger Delta region very insecure to do business in since it has become volatile and prone to conflicts. Expectedly, this state of insecurity has spread to other areas; it is in this vein that the security problem now bastardizing the northern part of the country should be understood. A lot of economic and political commentators have tended to situate the problem within the quest for federalism (Kolawole,

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2011). Others have singled out unemployment and poverty as a serious underlying factor and that the best way to kill off these threats is to resolve these contradictions. However, whatever the prescription, a significant aspect of this discourse is that the insensitive attitude displayed by the federal government in addressing the environmental issues in the Niger Delta which led to violent confrontation between the militant youths and security agents of the government opened the way for others to start pressing whatever demands they have on the Nigerian State. In other words the crisis today cannot be totally divorced from environmental related issues. Issues of unemployment, poverty, neglect and so on, feature greatly in the Niger Delta imbroglio occasioned by environmental decay

Understanding the Security Consequences of Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region

The series of environmental problems besetting the Niger Delta region is capable of engendering insecurity. Take for instance the problem of increasing population which can fuel wood cutting and overgrazing leading to deforestation and soil erosion as posited by MacDonald (1995). As trees are cut down, the forest can no longer act as carbon sink or sponge for rainfall and erosion strips the topsoil. This endangers the drinking water supply. Plants are also affected as removal of plants is followed by the steady degradation of formerly arable land into desert. Declining fertility causes food shortage. Impoverished peasants abandon the land; refugees or displaced farmers congregate or move to urban areas, relief camps or shanty town. This will surely have massive impacts on the cost of food as it will be beyond the reach of these displaced peasants. This will also engendered tense competition for scarce resources which will eventually lead to conflicts. The quest for arms/weapons will lead to arms race as parties involved will pursue or will be ready to buy arms and ammunitions. Conflicts of this nature eventually lead to:

i.   Massive movement of people from conflict-ridden areas to urban settings leading to class and ethnic conflict and general instability.
ii.   The eventual deposition of these guns in the hands of those who eventually use it for armed robbery activities and the likes.

If the problems that gave rise to this scenario in the first place are not addressed, they become permanent and threaten the very fabrics of society orderliness. In the Niger Delta region this scenario has played itself out very often. The Warri crisis between the Ijaws and Itsekiris in the late 1990s boils down to access and ownership of natural resources in spite of its political undertone. Another scenario is that of climate change which is very evident in Niger Delta region: Chalecki (2003) in linking environmental issues and national security has looked at the problem that global climate change will present for the American nation and its military. According to her, military mission and readiness will be adversely affected by environmental changes. In other words, the continuation of climate change means that the armed forces will see greater involvement in peacekeeping operations, small scale contingencies, operations other than war, regional wars and counter terrorism operations all possibly from a reduced level of readiness occasioned by increase disease exposure, energy demand etc. In the Niger Delta region, climate change has resulted to sea level rise and

displacement of people from their abode as evident in most communities in Bayelsa State and the riverine areas in Delta State Efe and Ndakara (2010) have conducted an equally fascinating empirical research on the impact of climate variability on crime rate in Warri metropolis of Delta State. Their findings shows that changes in rainfall pattern: increase rainfall and temperature tends to have a significant relationship on the wave of larceny, armed robbery, rape, murder, and manslaughter. In fact, this abnormality tends to increase as rainfall and temperature increases.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study evidently showed to show the futility on the part of policy makers in ignoring environmental related problems. The increasing awareness that international and national security to a large extent hinges on environmental quality and the mitigation of environmental degradation has prompted broad actions from world leaders globally. Global warming, climate change, changes in rainfall pattern, biodiversity loss, water pollution, and the likes are major causes of regional conflicts and instability and can become global if not addressed. Nigeria has had her own experience in this regard. However, it is clear that our national leaders have still not grappled with the idea or linked violent eruptions and instability to environmental issues as Oil MNCs exploratory activities in the region is still far from desire. The relative peace in the region must be built upon and may evaporate if genuine efforts by the government to address the myriads of problems facing the region are not seen. It is on this basis that the following recommendations are made:

- There is the need of the government to begin seeing environmental degradation in more conventional terms that is in conventional political instability as environmental degradation is the basis of many insecurity problems besetting the country today. This will enable it to use the existing security systems to monitor and manage environmental resources, thereby reducing tension in the polity

- In countries where the enforcement of environmental regulations and standards are weak, the role played by Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) can not be over emphasized. It act as checks to projects that may have serious environmental impacts on the environment as it tends to regulate the industrialization process with due regard to the environment. The government must be awaken to its responsibility of ensuring proper adherence to EIA because it is the most comprehensive means for assessing the potential environmental and social impacts of large scale development projects in countries where environmental safeguard are weak due to deficiencies in regulations and enforcement (*Li, 2008*). This will go a long way in ensuring environmental security in the region and by extension the security of the country.

- Lastly, basic problems like poverty, unemployment, and health problems which have become an off-shoot of oil exploration in the region must be urgently addressed by the government. These problems unattended can become serious threats to security as it has the potential of creating an army of discontent youths who can pose serious problem to national security.

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