

Nigeria: State Violence against Agriculture in the Niger Delta

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of petroleum exploration on agriculture in the Niger Delta. To attain this objective, the paper examines government policies and legislations regulating agriculture and the environment in Nigeria. The paper establishes that agricultural and environmental policies in Nigeria are deliberately structured against agriculture in the Niger Delta. This is demonstrated in political, physical, economic and social threats to agriculture in the region. These threats to agriculture persist knowing that aside food security, agriculture is a catalyst for peace as it guarantees a stable income and employment for the rural poor. The role of agriculture as an agent for peace in the Niger Delta is placed as a second fiddle to petroleum by the Nigerian state. Thus, state-company alliance continues to undertake unbridled ecological terrorism in the Niger Delta region. Furthermore, the totality of these policies and actions represents mute violence against the people of the Niger Delta, who had suffered a considerable loss of their livelihood sources. The resultant loss of livelihood sources precipitates conflicts in oil bearing communities of the Niger Delta. The paper suggests a review of Nigeria's National Policies' on Agriculture and Environment that militates against agriculture in the Niger Delta as the way forward. The paper demonstrates that Nigeria's agricultural and environmental policies have designated sections that inhibit agriculture in the Niger Delta; though, currently sustained as it ensures rents/royalties from petroleum.

Keywords-Agriculture, Niger Delta, State violence, Livelihood sources

But of all the occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture, none more profitable, none more delightful, none more becoming to a free man.

--Cicero, De Officiis, 1.51,

1. Introduction

"Agriculture remains principal activity of rural people" (FAO, 2006). It is a source of income, and employment (World Bank, 2008; IFAD 2002), an antidote to environmentally induced conflicts; and by extension a source of peace among rural dwellers (Messer, et al, 1998; de Soysa and Gleditsch, 1999; UNU-IAS Report, 2004; Addison, 2005). As a deltaic region with a massive rural population, agriculture forms the basis of life sustenance in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. To the people of the Niger Delta, agriculture is an unbreakable source/link in life sustenance. However, agriculture which serve all above purposes is callously plundered by governments (Schiff and Valdes 1992) including the Nigerian government. In Nigeria, for example, so much importance is attached to crude petroleum to the detriment of agriculture. Sectoral contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for crude petroleum rose steadily from an infinitesimal 0.3% (1960), 7.1% (1970), 22.0% (1980), 12.8% (1990), 47.5% (2000) to 40.6% in 2002 while that of agriculture nosedived from an appreciable 64.1% (1960), 47.6% (1970), 30.8% (1980), 39.0% (1990), 35.7% (2000) to 28.35% in 2002 (Adedipe, 2004:1). Thus, a shift from a reliance on agriculture to crude petroleum has had tremendous impact on agriculture and the localities where crude petroleum is mined. This overbearing dependence on crude petroleum is only but a harbinger to hunger, starvation, unemployment, etc, as crude petroleum is not only an exhaustible resource but beyond the exploitation capabilities of rural dwellers.

In order to tame the effects of petroleum on agriculture and those that depend on it, *The New Nigerian Agricultural Policy (1988)/Agriculture in Nigeria: The New Policy Thrust (2001)* and *The National Policy on the Environment (1998)* were set up as guiding policy documents.

These policy guidelines are expected to provide regulatory framework on agriculture and the environment in Nigeria devoid of selective administration in any part of Nigeria. However, discriminatory administration of these policies is noticed in the Niger Delta. Crude petroleum discovery in the late 1960s and the subsequent avidity for the proceeds arising from crude petroleum by successive Nigerian governments are identified as the culprits precipitating the selective policy implementation from the Nigerian state, especially with respect to communities in the Niger Delta (**Berry 1984; Diouf 1989; Adedipe 2004**).

The paper, therefore, investigates/examines Nigeria's agricultural, environmental and oil legislations with a view to discovering the rationale for the selective practice of such policies in the Niger Delta vis-à-vis other regions of the country. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. In section 2, Petroleum-Agriculture Dutch disease literature is examined. Section 3 examines sustainable agricultural development in the Niger Delta. Section 4 undertakes a review of environmental and agricultural policies in Nigeria. Section 5 explores spoliation of agriculture in the Niger Delta region. Section 6 concludes the study.

2. *Oil-agriculture nexus: the Dutch disease literature*

I call petroleum the devil's excrement. It is the devil's excrement. We are drowning in the devil's excrement. It brings trouble...waste, corruption, consumption, our public services falling apart. And debt, debt we shall have for years.
...Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso. *The Founder of OPEC*

To refer to a vast, valuable energy resource as the source of a "disease" sounds rather ungrateful
...*The Economist on the Netherlands*

Development scholars attempt to explain the phenomenon of a sector (e.g. agriculture) of an economy collapsing at the expense of another (e.g. petroleum). They identify the resource curse phenomenon, in particular, and its appendage the Dutch Disease, as the culprit. Thus, it is contended that economies dependent on a natural resource have adverse developmental consequences on other sectors of an economy such as agriculture (see **Corden and Neary, 1982; Gelb and Associates, 1988; Sachs and Warner, 1995; Auty, 2001; Stevens, 2003; Turshen, 2003; Wright and Czelusta, 2004; Karl, 2007; Lederman and Maloney, 2008**). Ross (1999:306) identified four variants of the resource curse with the fourth one being "*that a boom in resource exports can produce economic stagnation through an effect known as the Dutch Disease*". He explains the Dutch Disease as:

The combined influence of two effects that commonly follow resource booms: The first is the appreciation of a state's real exchange rate caused by the sharp rise in exports; the second is the tendency of a booming resource sector to draw capital and labour away from a country's manufacturing and agricultural sectors, raising their production costs. Together these effects can lead to a decline in the export of agricultural and manufactured goods and can inflate the cost of goods and services that cannot be imported (the non-tradable sector).

Dutch Disease as an explanatory paradigm has triggered divergent reactions. Some scholars have argued that it is specific to Sub-Saharan Africa (**Carmignani and Chowdhury n.d**). Others contest its existence, wondering if it is a disease after all? (**van Wijnbergen, 1984**). *The Economist* asserts that *to refer to a vast, valuable energy resource as the source of a "disease" sounds rather ungrateful*.

It is not the mere possession of a resource (e.g. petroleum) that is the cause of the poor performance of an economy dependent on such a resource, as Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, the renowned 16th century Spanish author of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (in **Ebrahim-zadeh 2003**) once asserted that "*the gratification of wealth is not found in mere possession or in lavish expenditure, but in its wise application*". Neary and van Wijnbergen (in **Ross 1999:307**) while corroborating the above assertion argue that:

In so far as one general conclusion can be drawn [from our collection of empirical studies] it is that a country's economic performance following a resource boom depends to a considerable extent on the policies followed by its government... [E]ven small economies have considerable influence over their own economic performance.

Ross (1999:305) concur arguing that "*more recent research suggests, however, that it is less common in developing states than originally thought, and that governments can usually offset its impact, should they feel it necessary*".

Norway was exceptional in turning petroleum to a blessing and advanced more than her Scandinavian neighbours (Larsen 2004). In Africa, Botswana is known and widely acknowledged for her efficient use of her mineral wealth. Atsushi (2006:9) sums up the Botswana mineral led developmental experience thus:

The reason Botswana has nevertheless achieved marked growth to date seems to be that it has sound institutions and good governance....They point out that Botswana's good institutions, particularly in the private property area, have stemmed from its pre-colonial political institutions, limited British colonialism, strong political leadership since independence, and the elite's motivation to reinforce institutions. According to the Governance Research Indicator Country Snapshot (GRICS)...Botswana has enjoyed relatively good governance by global and regional standards.

While smaller countries fared very well, Nigeria has fared rather poorly in managing the proceeds from her petroleum sector. Thus, to a large extent, agriculture has dwindled into insignificance in the country. No wonder Ross (1999:307) asserts "the failure of states to take measures that could change resource abundance from a liability to an asset has become the most puzzling part of the resource curse. Ross (1999:309-311) attributed the failure of states in adopting proactive measures to: (a) cognitive explanations implying "**resource wealth causes a type of myopia among public or private actors**", (b) societal explanations that "**resource booms enhance the political leverage of nonstate actors who favour growth-impeding policies**" and (c) state-centred explanations that, **rents reduce government dependence on taxes and therefore less accountable to the people**. Which of these variants explains Nigeria's dilemma? The following sections unravel Nigeria's petroleum-agriculture imbroglio.

3. Sustainable agricultural development in the Niger Delta

The idea that development must be proactive of future development prospects was brought to the limelight by the Brundtland Report (1987). For development to be sustainable, the report maintains, the "*process of change in which exploitation of resources, direction of investment, orientation of technological development, and institutional changes are made consistent with future as well as present needs. It is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*".

Arising from the Brundtland report, scholars argue for a sustainable agriculture that "focuses attention on the spatial dimensions of ecologically sustainable development in the context of regional resource use affecting land use. The concept of sustainable agriculture discusses the issue of regional sustainable development in relation to land use in such a way that the future generations would not be worse off" (Adeyemo, 2002: 65). Thus, for agricultural development to be sustainable, it must meet three goals, as enunciated by Adeyemo (2002:66) viz:

- a. "An acceptable level of welfare for the regional population that can be sustained in the future,
- b. Non-conflict with the focus of agricultural development at national or supra-regional level, and,
- c. Development of human factor¹ (HF) in agriculture".

It is expected that a holistic adoption and application of these goals be the cardinal objectives of the Nigerian state in the Niger Delta. The exploration and exploitation of crude petroleum must not jeopardize agriculture in the Niger Delta region, national development policies and their implementation must not be skewed against a region such as the Niger Delta, etc. The next section evaluates environmental and agricultural policies in Nigeria to meeting the above goals of sustainable agricultural development.

4. Environmental and agricultural policies in Nigeria

Nigeria never lacks policies. Agriculture and environmental sectors are not exceptions. But are these policies faithfully implemented without biases and inadequacies? The bane of Nigeria's policy environment has always been the will to do that which is appropriate.

Agricultural Policies

Nigerian governments had evolved several agricultural policies. *The New Nigerian Agricultural Policy (1988)*, *Agriculture in Nigeria: The New Policy Thrust (2001)*, etc, are policies launched by successive administrations in Nigeria. The policy goals were specific, stating inter alia: "*agriculture accounts for 88% of the non-oil foreign exchange earnings and employs about 70% of the active labour force of the population*."

The sector is a catalyst and major source of raw materials for the industrial sector and provides most of the staple food consumed by the 120 million Nigerians". In recognition of this importance, the 1988 agricultural policy specified a set of broad policy objectives, which include among others, the following:

- a) "increase in production of agricultural raw materials to meet the growth of an expanding industrial sector;
- b) creation of more agricultural and rural employment opportunities to increase the income of farmers and rural dwellers and to productively absorb an increasing labour force in the nation;
- c) protection and improvement of agricultural land resources and preservation of the environment for sustainable agricultural production";

The Obasanjo administration, upon a review of previous policies, came up with the *New Policy Thrust (2001)* intended to transform Nigerian agriculture. The focal points of the new policy were:

- a) "Creating the conducive macro-environment to stimulate greater private sector investment in agriculture so that the private sector can assume its appropriate role as the lead and main actor in agriculture;
- b) Rationalizing the roles of the tiers of government in their promotional and supportive activities to stimulate growth;
- c) Reorganizing the institutional framework for government intervention in the sector to facilitate smooth and integrated development of agricultural potentials;
- d) Articulating and implementing integrated rural development as a priority national programme to raise the quality of life of the rural people;
- e) Increasing agricultural production through increased budgetary allocation and promotion of the necessary developmental, supportive and service-oriented activities to enhance production and productivity and marketing opportunities;
- f) Increasing fiscal incentives to agriculture, among other sectors, and reviewing import waiver anomalies with appropriate tariffification of agricultural imports;
- g) Promoting increased use of agricultural machinery and inputs through favourable tariff policy".

The new policy thrust reveals no provisions relating to the management of the environment cum natural resources (Eboh 2004). Development scholars argue that such an omission is deliberate, a portrayal of insincerity, etc, intended to down play the impact oil exploration and exploitation activities have on the environment and agriculture in the Niger Delta. Olayemi et al (1994) in Olawumi, (2009) in a survey examined the effectiveness or otherwise of policies and regulations in different areas of agriculture. See survey results below:

Effectiveness of Policies, Regulations and Institutions on Nigerian Agriculture

Policies and Regulations	Rank	Position
Agricultural input supply to farmers	2.83	4
Agricultural input demand farmers	2.17	2
Foreign investment in agriculture	8.83	20
Domestic investment in agriculture	4.00	5
Commercialization of agriculture	6.17	14
Agricultural production for domestic market	1.83	1
Agricultural production for export market	5.33	8
Agricultural commodity storage	7.17	18
Agricultural commodity processing	6.17	15
Agricultural commodity transport, distribution and information	6.50	16
Domestic agricultural commodity trade	2.67	3
Agricultural commodity export	5.83	11
Agricultural commodity utilization	5.50	9
Agricultural research and technology development	4.33	7
Agricultural technology adoption	4.00	5
Food security	5.50	9
Poverty reduction	5.83	11
Closing gender gap	6.00	13
Protection/welfare of vulnerable groups	6.67	17
Sustainable environmental management	7.5	19

Source: Olawumi, (2009:10) N/B: - the lower the value, the better

Successive governments in Nigeria (as seen from the table) are insincere in her policies towards agriculture. For example, the A.U *Maputo Declaration on Agriculture*, to which Nigeria is a signatory, urged member states to a **“commitment to the allocation of at least 10 percent of national budgetary resources to agriculture and rural development policy implementation within five years”**. The 2010 budgetary allocation of **N148, 715,672,952** to agriculture was tagged as insufficient, especially as the sum represents only 3.7 per cent of the total budget of **N4, 079,654,724,257** proposed for the 2010 fiscal year. Farmers, under the auspices of the **Voice for Food Security Coalition**, condemn the 2010 Nigerian budget in its entirety, saying the *“budget is a disservice to the country in general and the agricultural sector in particular as it does not take to account the importance of the sector to national development and other current realities. We are rejecting the proposed budget because the amount appropriated for agricultural activities in the country is too small as compared to what is allocated to other sectors such as defence as the country is not at war”*. To an extent, some of these glaring insensitivities are deliberate. For example, sustainable environmental management in the table above secured the 19th position. This affirms the earlier assertion that the New Nigerian Agricultural Policy Thrust is insensitive to the environment.

-National policy on the environment (1998)

The opening paragraph of the *National Policy on the Environment* asserts that **“Nigeria is committed to a national environmental policy that will ensure sustainable development based on proper management of the environment”**. In order to achieve this feat the policy specified that Nigeria is committed to:

- a) *“Secure a quality of environment adequate for good health and well-being;*
- b) *Conserve and use the environment and natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations;*
- c) *Restore, maintain and enhance the ecosystems and ecological processes essential for the functioning of the biosphere to preserve biological diversity and the principle of optimum sustainable yield in the use of living natural resources and ecosystems;*
- d) *Raise public awareness and promote understanding of the essential linkages between the environment, resources and development, and encourage individual and community participation in environmental improvement efforts; and,*
- e) *Co-operate in good faith with other countries, international organizations and agencies to achieve optimal use of trans-boundary natural resources and effective prevention or abatement of trans-boundary environmental degradation”*.

The National Policy on the Environment as a document, reveals a couple of inherent anomalies that contradicts itself and more so, unfair to the rural dwellers in the Niger Delta. For example, section 4.7 of the policy document deals on agriculture with a committal statement that *“the viability or otherwise of the agricultural sector is crucial to the growth and development of a nation. The agriculture sector strongly impacts food security, industrialization efforts, quality of life, economic growth, political stability and, to a certain extent, a nation’s position in international relations and trade. The sustainability of this important sector should, therefore, be of paramount importance. Consequently, it is essential to establish a balance between efficient agricultural enterprise and environmental protection. The emphasis should be the promotion of ecologically sound and profitable farming systems and suitable rural development programmes principally aimed at small scale farmers”*. Also, oil and gas issues are extensively covered in section 4.14 (a-t) of the National Policy on the Environment. The policy document stated government’s desire to achieve sustainable exploitation strategies to be adopted nationally. However, this voiced level of commitment is not extended to the rural people of the Niger Delta as shown in the NESRA ACT, 2007.

5. Spoliation of livelihood sources in the Niger Delta

Threats to livelihood sources in the Niger Delta are diverse and varied. Among the several sources that have come to the focus of scholars include physical threats, economic threats, political threats (**Oruwari, et al, 2004**) and social threats.

-Physical threats:

The Niger Delta is the ancestral home and source of livelihood for the aborigines. It is rich in natural resources especially point resource like crude petroleum. It is the economic nerve centre of Nigeria. The region play host to oil MNCs. To that extent, an asymmetrical relationship between agriculture (**the main source of livelihood of the natives**) and crude oil (**the ultimate desire of the federal authorities in Nigeria**) is commonplace.

Petroleum exploration and exploitation has ascended the scale of preference so much so high to the detriment of agriculture and livelihood sources of rural communities in the Niger Delta. Petroleum exploration and exploitation has exposed the region to constant seismic operations with tremendous adverse impact on man and aquatic life patterns alike, oil spillage (which affect the fauna and flora of the Niger Delta ecosystem), flooding and degradation of agricultural land. Niger Delta, the erstwhile arable land for palm oil production, fishery and forestry is today the ghost of her former self. For example, **Daniel-Kalio and Braide (2006:10)** argued that “*there is some evidence to support farmers’ belief that gas flaring in the study area adversely affects their crop yields. The effects are of two kinds: direct and indirect. Gas flaring induces unfavourable environmental conditions, which lowers the potentiality of plants to yield well. Indirect effects involve the predisposition of plants to higher pest and disease attacks, the attraction of yam beetles and grasshoppers to the area which attack crops, and the enhancement of some weeds which are tolerant to gas flaring. Generally, the nearer plantains and oil palms are to gas flares, the poorer is their plant aspect*”. This conclusion was arrived at from their field survey of gas flare effects on plants; wherein farmers’ perception and field survey yielded the similar results. See table below:

Farmers’ Perception of the Effect of Gas Flaring on their Crops

Crop	Nature of problem attributed to gas flaring by farmers at Akri
Yam (<i>D. rotundata</i>)	Gas flare (GF) continuously emitting heat radiation, light and unburnt gas drastically reduces yield, both quantitatively and qualitatively. GF attracts insects, such as variegated grasshopper (<i>Zonocerus variegates</i>) that eats up vines, and yam beetle (<i>Heteroligus</i> spp.) that attacks yam tubers.
Cassava (<i>M. esculenta</i>)	Gas flare attracts grasshoppers, which eat up the plants
Rice (<i>O. sativa</i>)	No gas flare effect on rice was reported.
Mango (<i>M. indica</i>)	Gas flare causes premature ripening of fruits, especially during the dry season months of December-March each year.
Sweet orange (<i>C. sinensis</i>)	Gas flare effect is similar to that of mango. In addition farmers believe that toxic effluents dispersed by flood water to homes and farms adversely affect the crop.

Source: Daniel-Kalio and Braide (2006) p.6

Oil activities’ effects, especially oil spillage, are discovered to have known impacts on the fauna of the Niger Delta ecosystem. For example, clean-ups following oil spillages occurring around or flowing into nearby streams/rivers are never thoroughly done, as incalculable quantities of spilled oil settles on the river floor. Such spilled oil adversely affects fishery breeding and entire fish production. **Federal Ministry of Agriculture (Department of Fisheries 1995-2007)** statistics indicate an unsteady fish production among Niger Delta states. See appendix for table on Nigeria Fish Production (Artisanal) from Marine States (1995-2007) tones. A cursory look at the table reveals that the state of agriculture and livelihood sources in the Niger Delta is routinely threatened.

Physical threat to agriculture is also gender bias. A “**Survey on Women and Livelihoods in the Niger Delta**” revealed a negative ranking of the impact of oil and gas activities on women livelihood sources cum government responsiveness to such adverse impacts. The survey results are revealing indeed.

Ranking Order of Major Negative Impacts of Oil and Gas Activities

Negative Impacts	Responses
Destruction of farming and fishing implements	72
Low productivity	69
Degradation of fishing and farming sites	66
Abandonment of farming and fishing for other activities	27
Destruction of houses and properties	2

Source: Joab-Peterside (n.d), p.18

Rank ordering of Government and Oil Companies Action to address the impact of oil and gas activities on Agriculture and the Environment

Action taken by Government and Oil Companies	Responses
Nothing	78
Reclamation of land	12
Reforestation	11
Cleaning of polluted land, water and air	11
Erosion control	9
Protection of wild life	7
Killing of human beings	1

Source: Joab-Peterside (n.d), p.19

Government and Oil MNCs ultimate desire in the Niger Delta is petroleum and therefore considers livelihood sources derivable from agriculture and the physical environment as inconsequential (Thomas, 1992). In spite of the criminal negligence, agriculture is still a major source of employment in the Niger Delta; contrariwise petroleum is not a key employer of labour in the region. See table below.

Distribution of Employed Working Population by activity and Region

State	Agric	Fish	Manuf.	Constr.	Trade	Transp.	Public Admin	Educ.
Abia	44	0	4	3	25	4	4	4
A/Ibom	35	2	2	2	26	5	4	3
Bayelsa	34	19	3	4	16	2	7	8
C/River	68	0	1	1	9	2	5	5
Delta	38	6	4	4	21	5	5	4
Edo	41	1	6	3	22	5	3	5
Imo	50	0	3	3	20	4	3	3
Ondo	42	2	3	3	27	4	5	5
Rivers	49	4	4	5	13	3	6	7
Niger Delta	44	4	3	3	20	4	5	5

Source: World Bank 2008, p.63

• **Economic threats**

Economic threats to livelihood sources in the Niger Delta manifest in the depletion of aquatic lives, deforestation of farm lands and loss of biodiversity resulting from overexploitation of existing resources and the resultant pollution. Agricultural production had experienced dwindling fortunes since the ascendancy of crude oil. Men turn from agriculture to seek alternative employment in the oil and gas sector. Thus, economic threat to livelihood sources in the Niger Delta has a gender dimension. It is highly skewed against women. Some argue this result from the highly physical nature of oil and gas activities. To that extent, the industry is male dominated. This structural arrangement alienates women who are in most cases the bread winners of their respective homes (Omorodion, 2004).

• **Political threats**

Threats to livelihood sources in the Niger Delta also have a political dimension. Political threats, amongst others include the appropriation of local resource rights by the federal might in Nigeria, the enabling legal environment that effectuates the appropriation process and the marginalization of local communities. A set of legal instruments in Nigeria ensures the unbridled and callous exploitation of natural resources in the Niger Delta. The following suffices it all:

➤ **The Land Use Act, 1978:**

This is the basic instrument of land use policy in Nigeria. The act, originally initiated as a decree, vested the ownership of land in the hands of state governments "in trust for the people". However, the right to the use of land was to be permissible through statutory rights granted by the state governors for urban lands and customary rights granted to local governments for rural land. The promulgation of the Land Use Act has always been surrounded by much suspicion-the avidity to control the oil wealth in the Niger Delta, for example. Thus, the land use act stands out to be the most obnoxious of all legal documents that deprived oil communities in the Niger Delta.

Ojo and Gaskiya (2003:206) argued that the Land Use Act has “doubtlessly, since its inception, become a constant and disturbing piece of legislation”. Onagoruwa in Ojo and Gaskiya (2003) argues the land use act as a “*source of confusion, misunderstanding and perplexity both to the citizens, the lawyers and the judges whose awesome responsibility it is to interpret its provision*”. For Adeyemo (2002) the land use act is a means of land alienation.

➤ **The Petroleum Act, 1969**

This act ensures the exploration of petroleum from the territorial waters and the continental shelf of Nigeria and vests the ownership of and all on-shore and off-shore revenue from petroleum resources derivable there-from in the Federal Government and for all other matter incidental thereto. The effect of this and other decrees such as the Petroleum Production and Distribution (Anti-Sabotage) Decree No.35, 1975, the Miscellaneous Offences Decree (Decree No. 20, 1984), etc, is that land occupants and their use of land is not valued in the face of crude discovery in a locality (Adeyemo, 2002).

➤ **The NESRA Act**

The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (Establishment) Act (2007), replaced the erstwhile Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA). Part I (section 2) of the NESRA Act stated inter alia the following as the statutory objectives of the agency: ***The Agency, shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, have responsibility for the protection and development of the environment, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development of Nigeria’s natural resources in general and environmental technology, including coordination and liaison with relevant stakeholders within and outside Nigeria on matters of enforcement of environmental standards, regulations, rules, laws, policies and guidelines.***

The NESRA Act, unlike FEPA, which was empowered to protect the environment throughout Nigeria, is barred from carrying out environmental laws and regulations in oil bearing communities, because the law specifically exempts their operation in the oil and gas sector. Sections 7 and 8 are of immense importance the oil bearing communities. Section 7(g-K) of the Act provides that the Agency shall:

- g) Enforce compliance with regulations on the importation, exportation, production, distribution, storage, sale, use handling and disposal of hazardous chemicals and waste other **than in the oil and gas sector.***
 - (h) Enforce through compliance monitoring, the environmental regulations and standards on noise, air, land, seas, oceans and other water bodies **other than in the oil and gas sector.***
 - (i) Enforce environmental control measures through registration, licensing and permitting system other **than in the oil and gas sector.***
 - (k) Conduct environmental audit and establish data bank on regulatory and enforcement mechanisms of environmental standards **other than in the oil and gas sector.***
- Section 8 (g, k, I, m, n, o,) provides that the Agency shall:
- (g) Conduct public investigations on pollution and the degradation of natural resources, **except investigations on oil spillage;***
 - (k) Submit for the approval of the Minister, proposals for the evolution and review of existing guidelines, regulations and standards on environment **other than in the oil and gas sector** including—atmospheric protection, air quality, ozone depleting substances, noise control, effluent limitations, water quality, waste management and environmental sanitation, erosion and flood control, coastal zone management, dams and reservoirs, watershed, deforestation and bush burning, other forms of pollution and sanitation, and control hazardous substances and removal control methods,*
 - (l) Develop environmental monitoring networks, compile and synthesize environmental data from all sectors **other than in the oil and gas sector** at national and international levels;*
 - (m) Undertake, coordinate, utilize and promote the expansion of research experiments, surveys and studies by public or private agencies, institutions and organizations concerning causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction and elimination of pollution and such other matters related to environmental protection and natural resources conservation **other than in the oil and gas sector** as the Agency may, from time to time, determine;*
 - (n) Enter into agreement and contracts with public or private organizations and individuals to develop, utilize, coordinate and share environmental monitoring programmes, research effects, and basic data on chemical, physical and biological effects of various activities on the environment and other environmental related activities **other than in the oil and gas sector***

The exclusion of oil and gas matters in the provisions of the NESRA Act is deliberate. This view is sustained because Article 1, section 1(one) of the ***Environmental Right for Present and Future Generations*** ensures a ***Right to an Ecologically Healthy Environment***: “Present and future generations of citizens of the State have the right to an ecologically healthy environment. This right includes but is not limited to: the enjoyment of clean air, pure water, and scenic lands; freedom from unwanted exposure to toxic chemicals and other contaminants; and a secure climate”.

Community and individual agricultural land rights are relegated to the background in the oil bearing Niger Delta. This is indeed a manifestation of deliberate violence against a people. The totality of these legal provisions has deprived oil communities of their livelihoods

- **Social threat**

The ecological effects of oil exploration and exploitation on agriculture are not without their attendant social consequences on oil communities. One of such consequences manifests in the social life oil communities. Oil locations create a false atmosphere of life being sweet. This false atmosphere precipitates a lot of unholy practices. “Ashawo villages” where single girls engage in sordid sex networking becomes commonplace. In some other oil communities, an upsurge in single girls renting rooms is widely seen and practiced. Credit sex is equally common, with sporadic quarrels resulting from the unwillingness/reluctance of a male oil worker to pay-up an outstanding “debt”. The populations of the girls that patronize commercial sex networking in oil communities are both indigene and non-indigenes who migrate from neighbouring communities and states.

Other consequences are that there is moral decadence in the family institution (e.g. sharp disagreements within families arising from legally married wives engaging sex networking), collapse of marriages (e.g. house wives splitting from husbands so as to partake in the sex trade) and its resultant effect in single parenthood, cost of living suddenly becomes skyrocketing, with prices of common household commodities beyond the reach of the common people who have little or nothing to benefit from the oil environment. It is such sad tales from Bonny that precipitated Jike (2004:697) to say,

There is a compelling need to believe that the institution of marriage as it is traditionally conceived has been largely defiled and compromised. The wives' tales coming out of Bonny where the LNG projects are located are that many wives abandon matrimony in preference for young White oil workers who have more than enough money to spend as opposed to their struggling husbands. The link between husband and wife becomes more tenuous as the financial wherewithal of the husband diminishes. As expected, among young couples divorce is on the rise, once-revered values have become supplanted by fads, and the prospects of institutional continuity have become more cumbersome”.

6. Conclusion

Agriculture remains a potent catalyst for peace in the Niger Delta. Policy documents such as the ***National Policy on Environment*** and ***Agriculture in Nigeria: the New Policy Thrust*** intended to enthrone sustainable exploitation of agricultural and natural resources in Nigeria and indeed the Niger Delta have not yielded the expected outcomes. This abysmal failure is often attributed to desire for oil profit at the detriment of the localities, indigenes and agriculture where petroleum is explored. The avidity for oil proceeds and the environmental degradation arising from oil exploration and exploitation activities often times precipitates oil company-community conflicts.

The Nigeria State has often used violence as a means for solving company-community conflicts. Violence and military options for solving the Niger Delta crisis has never worked. This paper suggests that regulatory agencies and policies be restructured to tame the tide of environmental destruction perpetrated by oil MNCs and by so doing give agriculture the pride of place it deserves in serving as a catalyst for peace, income, employment, etc, in the Niger Delta. By extension, the ongoing Amnesty Programme would not succeed if it only caters for the youths that have laid down their arms vis-à-vis the unabated environmental devastation against agricultural land and consequently the loss of livelihood sources of the Niger Delta people.

Appendix

Nigeria Fish Production (Artisanal) from Marine States (1995-2007)

States	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
A/Ibom	13,079	33,970	37,708	69,275	76,639	87,586	80,724	94,652	87,654	85,452	95,752	96,707	92,043
Bayelsa	0	0	0	15,983	17,530	16,282	26,112	30,165	24,186	21,718	24,326	26,956	25,470
C/River	10,527	9,181	9,533	11,628	11,023	11,906	13,959	10,972	12,279	11,074	12,081	12,438	13,775
Delta	51,681	17,552	19,013	20,332	21,612	26,038	22,661	25,025	24,575	23,933	28,774	30,378	26,539
Ondo	15,064	15,258	15,795	10,387	11,601	19,608	20,279	20,767	21,450	21,563	22,391	22,651	22,686
Rivers	45,299	36,710	63,051	47,951	52,591	48,845	55,450	52,301	52,730	48,639	54,189	56,655	52,903
Total	135650	112671	145100	175556	190996	210265	219185	233882	222874	212379	237513	245785	233416

Source: Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Fisheries Department, 1995-2007)

Notes

1. Human factor (HF) development in agriculture encompasses the development of human and material resources, efficient management of rural institutions, sustained and accelerated agricultural productivity, enhanced income and standard of living of rural dwellers, making life as comfortable in the rural areas as in the urban centres or making the development of man to be the relevant and adequate measure of rural growth and development (see Adeyemo, 2002:66).

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