

CLIMATE CHANGE AND OIL EXTRACTION CONSEQUENCES ON WOMEN'S HEALTH AND LIVELIHOOD IN THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Oil production and climate change are bringing about serious environmental degradation to the Niger Delta region and women are forced to take an outsized burden. This paper discusses the implications of these overlapping problems in the health and livelihood of women. The damage created by Oil spills, gas flares and pollution to the ecosystem of the region has devastated the health of women by exposing them to toxic materials in high quantities, Respiratory complications and health challenges in reproductive systems. Climate change compounds such issues leading to more flooding, erosion and subsequent depletion of fertile lands putting more pressure on the lives of women. Women have become less secure with regard to food as well as income-generating activities due to loss of farmlands and fisheries. In addition, women have suffered mentally in psychosocial terms due to displacement, loss of their livelihoods, and violence. This paper accentuates the pressing requirement to confront the livelihood and health question experienced by women in Niger Delta. It advocates using corporates and governments accountability to environmental degradation and human rights violation. Other issues in the study beset the relevance of sustainable livelihoods and economical empowerment to women and climate-resilient solutions, which tap into the needs of people identified as being vulnerable. The findings of the present research may hold great significance in policy-making and practice since the gender-sensitive approach to coping with the consequences of oil extraction and consequences of climate change should be provided. Through listening and catering to the needs of the women of the Niger Delta, we are going to have a more just and fair future.

Keywords: Climate Change, Oil Extraction, Womenhood, Health, Livelihoods, Niger Delta.

Introduction

Climate change and oil extraction in the Niger Delta are severely impacting women's health and livelihoods. Oil spills and gas flaring, exacerbated by climate change, contaminate water and land, impacting agriculture and fishing, traditionally women's domains. This leads to food insecurity, health problems, and economic hardship, disproportionately affecting women who bear the primary responsibility for household needs.

The Niger Delta Region (NDR) in Nigeria is believed to be one of the largest wetland areas of the world that is heavily endowed with oil and is also densely endowed with biodiversity. It is the most diversified ecologically in Nigeria since it hosts both aquatic life and terrestrial life and the mangrove forest and it is the economic capital in Nigeria since it is blessed with

enormous deposits of oil. These reserves have made Nigeria the major producer of crude oil in the world. Ecological stability and livelihood depends heavily on the biodiversity in the region but Nigeria has been able to rely on its oil production as the primary stabilizing factor in its economy allowing it to provide significant shares of the GDP and foreign exchange.

Niger delta is among the nine states of Nigeria which include the following: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. The population of all these states is about 20 million. Niger delta is also a multi ethnic region, which has more than 250 dialects and about 5,000 tribes speaking them. The Niger Delta is generally considered the minority of Southern Nigeria even though it has grown into oil producing states (Olorode, 2000; Raji et al., 2000).

Natural climatic effects like coastal erosion, flooding, biodiversity and infrastructure damage are worsened by the effects of oil production which include spills and flaring of gases resulting into environmental migration and war. As an illustration, rice fields, rivers, and lakes are polluted by oil spills that reduce the supply of fishes and destroy crops, thereby growing food insecurity of people who need to fish and/or farm in rural areas. As the oil host population continues increasing, the destruction and pollution caused by the exploration of fossil fuel in the oil producing fields has come to concern the immediate neighbourhood and other parts of the world to an extent that the fossil fuel exploration in the NDR can be considered as one of the most threatened oil producing fields in the world.

There are several strategies to climate adaptation which have been implemented, but the area suffers only increasing environmental vulnerability and an absence of the socio-economic and infrastructural growth, despite its role in national economy. Even though many studies are available to know the effects of oil production in the NDR, they have not paid much attention to the inter-related vulnerabilities of oil activities and climate change in the area. The paper researches this complex relationship with particular reference to the adaptation measures that can help to create resilience and enhance sustainable development to overcome the challenges peculiar to the oil communities of the Niger Delta. Climate change is defined as a lengthy change in temperatures and weather patterns. Since the emission of green house gases covers the Earth, the heat of the sun is being trapped. That results in global warming and climate change. The globe is experiencing a steep increase in global temperatures than in the past history. The changes in weather patterns and alteration of natural balance of things are being caused by an increase in temperature over the years. This poses very serious threat to human and any other living thing on earth. The transformation that occurs to the global climate is swift even when compared with the natural transformations of climate that occurred throughout the history of the earth. Warming of the global temperature, rise in the sea-level, heat content of the upper ocean waters, reduction in the mass of the terrestrial ice, sea ice in the Arctic, amount of seasonal permafrost thawing, and other signs described by climate show that the world is warming. Such trends are not secretive and have been re-analysed by different independent research organisations all across the globe.

Rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns are some of the indicators of climate change in Nigeria. An rise at the shore and a decrease over the continent. It is also seen in droughts, deserts, sea level rise, erosion, floods, thunderstorms and bushfires, landslides, land

degradation, extreme weather, and biodiversity loss. Nigeria is also Africa's wealthiest economy, most populous country, and source of vast natural resources, especially oil and gas.

Most accounts of Nigerian conflicts have ignored gender issues, with little knowledge of women's roles, despite the fact that women in the Niger Delta have played important roles in mediating nonviolent protests over oil, as well as the Boko Haram crisis in the region and the ethno-religious and indigene/settler crisis in the North (Mai-Bornu 2020, 2019). Rather, research on Nigerian conflicts tends to focus on generations of young males who have been denied social opportunities in politics (Aghedo and Osumah, 2015). In most situations, the researcher has a tendency to write about women but not undertake study with them in order to gain a clear picture of their experiences (Gasztold 2017). The analysis of many arguments presented in the structures of exploitation, inequalities, marginalization, and gender brings up the question of whose voices are heard and/or whose body is being edited in the terms of resources and sustenance. The study indicates that women become victims during war and peacebuilding (Bias & Gurler, 2020; Mwambari, 2017; Olaitan & Isike, 2019; Tobach, 2008). Assuming that all went well and there was no injustice and that there was no equal treatment of natural resources, would then the women who have been exposed to oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta be the happiest and the most prosperous women in the world (Abah, 2009)?

In 2022, I am examining some of the main components of this effect, where I merely pose the following question, how is the oil extractive industry impacting on the livelihoods of women in the Niger Delta? Forty nine ladies were involved in a participatory video. They are not political women but mere women in the society. The general concerns that such women will present in my interview with them will be connected with natural resources and voicelessness. The interview transcripts were also carefully intertwined with the sentences so that the sentences sounded natural to the comments of the women.

Delta State in Nigeria is the world's largest producer of petroleum, and it is located in the country's South-South geopolitical zone, which the people of the region see as the Big Heart and the source of their products. The ethnic groups, including Isoko and Eruwa, are year-old inhabitants who live in the state's center; Ukwuani is east, Ika/Olukumi is northeast, Anioma Igbo is northwest, and all of the Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Uvwie live southwest. Delta State is blessed with nature in its ecological zone, which comprises tropical savannah and monsoon vegetation. Farming is one of the most effective means of survival for individuals. The state's land is home to a human population, and the state's primary agrarian activities are fish farming and crop production.

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta is under the clutches of a dreadful environmental-change-climate mix because decades of oil exploration has taken its toll. Females of the area are overrepresented, experiencing severe complications to their health and economic survival. Due to the pollution and the destruction of the environment, serious health problems have occurred which include reproductive health problems, respiratory problems, and higher susceptibility to disease. The situation is further being worsened by climate change which has led to more flooding, erosion and conversion of arable land that endangers women livelihoods and food security.

Even though these challenges are as intense as they are, little is known and done on the specific effects these changes have on the lives and health of women in Niger Delta in terms of climate change and oil extraction. The research in the field that emphasizes the connections between the climate changes, oil extraction industry, and the health and livelihoods of women in the region and influencing the policies and interventions to enhance sustainable development and climate justice, as well human rights is demanded.

This paper is intended to bridge this research gap and will investigate the impacts of climate change and oil production on the health and livelihood of women in the Niger Delta and will identify possible solutions and recommendations to be given to the policy maker, practitioner and community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The implication to socio-economic life of women of Niger Delta

We all know very well that the agonizing oil crises in the Niger Delta region is a symptom of acute ethnic marginalization. Because of this, the central government has been incapable of meeting the needs of this region. Moreover, when there was a conflict, the women would show non-violence with arms and demand the basic rights, and people would be connived to get wounded and even killed in the interest of the overseas company and also ensure that they would be there all the time. This has been the case many times; a non-governmental organization, the Environmental Rights Action (ERA) has continued to urge the federal government to call back its troops posted at the oil flow stations and negotiate with the disgruntled people, but nothing has happened. All these never ceased as the war and protests continue (Ozo-Eson, 2000; Branigan and Vidal, 2002). It is hideous that humans are living in a land of milk and honey and starving.

The majority of the children born by Niger Delta women (graduates) lack employment; therefore, there is no way they would ever rise up any career in oil companies and that is why the multinationals employ unskilled men and women and pay them out petty wages (Darah, 2001).

Niger Delta area has been a pot of fire rings in the recent years between the native people occupying the area, the state, and the oil and gas companies. Lesser jurisdictions in the region. The states and provinces in the region have been demanding a greater measure of control, as well as a portion of the oil revenues. Earlier on the federal government got 80 percent (presently every oil producing state gets 13 percent) with the federal government getting 77 percent. Most importantly, the Land Use Act of the year 1978 gave all the natural resources in the region to the federal government thus leaving the government of the region with no control or ownership of the resources. In this instance, not all people can expect peace because one cannot achieve peace without justice as John Paul II of blessed memory once stated. The second issue is with regard to how justice would be achieved (Pope John Paul II, 1998; Agbola and Olurin, 2003; Torulagha, 2007).

Most of the grievances expressed by women in these spheres indicate that multinational corporations and the government are not much interested in enhancing the lives of the indigenes in the Niger-Delta regions. There is the increasing rate of unemployment as majority

of youths are on the streets hunting aimlessly. Even now, these rivers are under the authority of military guys having rifles and also they rape and abuse people. Gas flaring and environmental pollution are still future objectives that should be halted and solutions brought in. There is no need to touch criminality, bribery, and corruption as this is rapidly getting out of control. Claiming that there is any gain in any of these communities would mean that there is an overnight incredible change that has never been the case (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Climate Change and its impact on Women's Health

Climate change significantly impacts women's health by exacerbating existing gender inequalities and increasing vulnerability to various health risks. These impacts include disruptions to sexual and reproductive health, increased exposure to gender-based violence, and heightened risks of various diseases.

Climate change and depletion of the ozone layer are some of the major global environmental changes which most influenced the lives of people especially their health life, WHO (1996) and McMichael (1996). The vulnerable effect of climate change especially on developing countries such as Nigeria is due to the fact that they heavily rely on climate-sensitive resources. The first activity in this part of the world that poses a threat to climate change is the emission of gases and other harmful substances to the atmosphere that have been released as a result of oil and gas harvesting industry mainly through gas flaring which is prevalent in the Niger Delta region and off shore. The secondary activity is the paring of trees and loss of forest through logging and the use of tree as firewoods and wood products. Approximately 600,000 hectares of the Nigerian forest is felled down each year to sustain these industries (Nwoke and Nwoke, 2008). And these have tremendously impacted on the entire socioeconomic life of our people.

Climate change has a direct impact on extreme occurrences such as heat waves, floods, landslides, droughts, windstorms, and wildfires. Climate change's indirect health implications include disruptions to natural systems that cause infectious diseases, malnutrition, food and waterborne infections, and air pollution (Nwoke & Nwoke, 2008).

Climate Change Adaptation Strategies

Climate change adaptation or rather climate variability relies on challenges related to wealth, technological capabilities, and information availability, to mention a few, which are critical issue areas among women (Parikh, 2013). Climate of the earth will keep on changing, therefore there should be measures put into consideration to control diseases burdens, injury, disability and death. The adaptation measures are responses to real or anticipated climatic triggers or impacts by adjustment in natural life or human systems that moderate damage or exploits positive openings. Adaptive capacity is the ability of a system to respond to climate change (including climate variability and climate extremes) to minimize the effects of potential damages, to exploit opportunities, or cope with effects.

Some case studies on gender and natural disaster revealed that women play significant role in disaster reduction and this is normally unofficially via engagement in disaster management and also as agents of societal change. In the household and community recovery, specifically, women resilience and women networks are considered crucial (IPCC, 2007b).

Consequently, we have policy and program suggestions to the issues of climate change adaptation in the fields of injury, disease, and death related to natural disasters and heat waves, illnesses induced by food-borne, water-borne pathogens, and vectors, premature death and illness caused by air pollution, and huge human populations displaced by sea level rise, flood, and drought followed by famine. These adaptation techniques will be of great help to the men when implemented especially to the women who are the most adversely hit.

Niger Delta communities wrestle with farming crisis as Shell pulls out

Locals say that formerly rich Niger delta farmlands that used to sustain entire generations of people are now broken by the oil contamination. Reporters in Gas outlook Africa are: Samuel Ajala, Paul Tullis, Marcello Rossi and Abdulwaheed Sofiullahi.

Gladys Osaro, her family and the community where they practice subsistence farming have been farming their ancestral farmland in one of the communities in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State in the Niger Delta region and Gladys remembers the time when the community used to yield tons upon tons of pumpkins, corn and cassava. Then, she remembers, one could fill three or four bags by picking off some few stems of the plant.

It was all different, however, when the farmland was start getting polluted by oil spills. This means that she must clear one acre now to get four bags of cassava. To make things even worse, the spills that are yet to be cleaned have brought hordes of ants that consume her farms and she is left to harvest sparse harvests.

Osaro, 45, said: You plant pumpkins, when they grow big you find that the ants eat all of them. You need to apply chemicals such as fertilisers and other treatment so that you can even be able to produce them.

She also highlighted the harmful effects of the oil spill on the region because crops have withered; there has been poor germination and yield. She also added that the clean up exercise has not come to present the desired fruitful results since the areas cleaned are still hard and not conducive to planting.

They have spent the past four to five years cleaning that area and by the time planting time comes, she said the soil becomes hard to work with. They would break the oil; they would soften the ground, and we ought to be able to plant without a hoe, but we could not cut the ground with a hoe. I do not know how they maintain this clean-up."

Niger Delta is a very rich ecosystem in the West of Africa that has numerous aquatic animals, fish and aquatic plants; the animals and plants also flourish on land. It serves as source of livelihood to many of the ethnic groups in the region like the Ogonis and Gokanas, whose survival depends on the natural resources deposits that the territory has.

The world is now familiar with the ecological and socio-economic consequences faced in the process of oil extraction in Ogoni territory since the discovery of oil in the region in the 1950s, according to ActionAid international, Shell aided by the government of Nigeria has engaged itself in exploiting oil and doing this at the expense of both the people and the environment.

Spills of oil are not new in Niger delta, Nigeria. The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) reckon that between 2011 and 2022, 10,463 oil spills were reported in the region, which poured 507,135 barrels of the oil into the environment. Ogoniland is destructively damaged. In 2008 the Shell Trans-Niger pipeline discharged an approximate 600,000 barrels of oil into the Nigerian land.

The organisation that causes most pollution in the region, Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited often uses the excuse of sabotage to refer to oil spills such as the oil leak in Oghale. Most of the massive spills have been connected with equipment failures and older, improperly maintained pipes, which the locals in the token believe, caused this disaster.

Gas Outlook was on a visit to the Niger Delta in July 2024, and it was informed that the leaking pipeline had recently sent oil by leaking into the ground and river. The findings of the Joint Investigation Visit (JIV) that saw the participation of the authorities of the oil industry, the affected community, and government agencies regarding the determination of the cause of a spillage has not been published. The federal agency of NOSDRA, the body that disseminates such reports, has not issued any report of an inquiry since 2022 and has remained silent over questions about the date on which--or whether--the latest report will be published.



Polluted river in Nigeria's Bodo village (Photos by Paul Tullis, Samuel Ajala, Marcello Rossi, and Abdulwaheed Sofiullahi).

Emmanuel Obemeata, a researcher in environmental health who heads the Department of Environmental Health in the University of Port Harcourt has conducted a study in the oil spill. He did not deny the fact that sabotage was the most probable reason, but also mentioned that older pipelines were a major possible source.

The case is concerned with expired pipelines, he added. In case the crude oil keeps flowing through these pipelines, spills are bound to be experienced since the infrastructure is in poor conditions and will collapse at one point.

As such, considering the magnitude of the spill and the devastation it had caused to the fishing people, some locals and activist in Ogoniland believed (with good reason) that Shell had not stopped its exploration of the area altogether in 1993 as it claimed, though actively and officially it did give up exploration a few years after it started, but it has continued to secretly explore.



High-speed boat in Eleme community in Nigeria (Photo credit Paul Tullis, Samuel Ajala, Marcello Rossi, Abdulwaheed Sofiullahi)

The farmlands that have served communities living in the villages around Bodo in the past few decades have been left barren following oil pollution and thus farming can no longer be practiced in the villages. Kay Holtzmann, a German geologist who used to work at Shell expressed in a letter written in 2017 that the ground in the region is drenched in hydrocarbons. It is also found that oil spills have destroyed aquatic ecosystems and facing people to lose their livelihoods to a great extent, as generations depend upon these rivers to sustain their means and day-to-day requirements.

Mene Michael, Chairman of the Council of Traditional Rulers of the Bodo Community, expressed deep dissatisfaction. According to him, fisherman in his village have to paddle for kilometers to find food. And when they return, the fish they caught are frequently rotten. He was lamenting that the food chain was completely disorganized.

Its economic damage is devastating. Those people who were farmers and fishermen and provided their families fail to purchase food, pay school fees, and/or obtain medical care. Most also have no choice but to find other sources of livelihood which in most cases involves migration to town where new threats of underemployment and poverty emerge.

A resident and an activist of the Ebubu community in Eleme, Wir-Le Agbaalor, pointed out that he was educating communities on the unscrupulous effects of oil spills, and discouraging related actions such as pipeline vandalism, that not only harm societies at the moment but also negatively affect the lives of the future generation to come.

He criticised efforts being made to remediate which he said were not tackling the fundamental environmental degradation. The lack of clean water in the area was also deplored by him, as the water given by oil companies is not sufficient and the inhabitants of the area have to use steams which are chemically polluted.

The last initiative that Agbaalor urged the government to implement was the involvement of communities in spill investigations as well as decision-making and the possibility of Joint Investigation Visits being transparent.

This is what I want the government to do in relation to this to tell the people the truth. Honest in the sense that where ever there is spillage, the community must be given the room to come in and investigate and also air out his views in that matter, he said.

Theoretical Framework

The different impacts of oil and gas exploration to the female of the Niger Delta would be properly diagnosed in the approach of ecofeminism. It was initially a theory proposed by the Françoise d'Eaubonne (Hornby, 2005). The theory puts emphasis on the fact that environmentalism and feminism had a lot in common (Maria, Mies, & Vandana, & Shiva, 1993).

The ecofeminists insist that there is a close analogy between the oppression of women at a familial and a social level, and the depreciation of nature, by creating a difference into dualities, with practical hierarchies founded upon differences, which permit an institutionalized apposition of dominance ... (NPC, 2009). The domination of the multinational oil companies in the study area had led to exploitation and degradation of women and impoverishment of women. Supporting the claims of the ecofeminists, Heather Eaton observed that ecofeminism understood from where the domination of nature was linked with the exploitation of women.

Those who believe in this doctrine usually recommend extreme respect of life and significance of the relationship that exists between human beings, nonhuman beings and the earth. Keeping the thesis of ecofeminism in view, one can understand the present study and contributing factors of the same in the light of a close nexus of the indifference of the operating oil companies to the situation that leads to the ecosystem dissolution which they did not have/or could not repair or rectify those damages that they had caused to the ecosystem on one hand and devastation of livelihood means of the women of the Niger Delta, on the other.

Niger Delta Gas Flaring Destroys Health, Climate and Environment

The Obrikom community is situated in what is referred to as the oil city of Nigeria and the largest city in the country, Port Harcourt, which is 76 kilometres away. It is mainly tranquil and hosts indigenous Ogba who are mostly farmers and fisher folk, traders. Cultural beliefs

and customs, such as the appreciation of annual community river cleansing (known as Nchaka) and feasting of new-yam festivals among others are highly revered by Ogba people in spite of civilisation even though, it is a total population of approximately 400,000.

During the five-day Nchaka, the traditional rulers, or village chiefs, and the elder women traverse the rivers, chanting incantations and performing rituals to drive off evil spirits, bad luck, and diseases from the community. The elderly women are clad in traditional Akwefe textiles that wrap around their shoulders and waists, holding flaming fuel in their right hands. They have their homes, a combination of apartments and bungalows, covered by zinc houses in rusted hat like Royal attires. It has sandy streets with asphalted and half built up in a cobbled manner with small kiosks everywhere. A couple of badly done drainage gutters most of them half-filled with sand. In addition to these, there is something tragic occurring in Obrikom which is gas flaring. It is the burning of the natural gas related to oil mining.

Its gas plant holds three gas flare towers which are taller than the surrounding community. All the time, spouting smoky methane-tinged fires, the stacks belch out more or less disagreeable noise, to the sky. As has been discovered by specialists at the Federal University of Technology in Minnesota, such noise may have the sound level up to 86 decibels. The average temperature of the neighborhood is 33 degrees Celsius and this is very hot during the dry season. According to a study released by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, houses around gas flare stacks, as those in Osi could reach up to four degrees Celsius hotter than others.

Every year, Nigeria Agip Oil Company (a subsidiary of Italian oil giant Eni) and the Nigerian government collect millions of Euros from the factory, while the citizens of Obrikom confront health and environmental difficulties comparable to Azubuike, the story's protagonist. For example, between January and March 2020, Nigeria sold gas worth 243.57 million dollars to both domestic and export markets. In April, Samuela Isopi, the European Union Ambassador to Nigeria, claimed that the Russia-Ukraine situation could result in the EU receiving 40% of Nigeria's gas supply.

Gas flaring has a harmful impact on the climate and the environment. According to studies, it contributes to global warming by emitting carbon dioxide. Gas flaring causes acid rain, which affects soil productivity in agriculture. Another study conducted by scientists at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, showed that rain in the Niger Delta, particularly in Rivers State, where Obrikom is located, is acidic as a result of gas flaring. It also has an indirect effect on people's well-being.

According to statistics from the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) of the Federal Ministry of Environment of Nigeria, the country flared 3.4 billion standard cubic feet (Mscf) between January 2013 and December 2021, costing \$12 billion. This resulted in 182.3 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions, according to tracker data.

Refining further to the local government area where Obrikom is situated; the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government area, in the same duration, 129.3 million Mscf of gas was flared hence emitting 6.9 million of tonnes of CO₂.

According to the experts, dwellers in the areas where the gas flaring is rampant are more likely to develop medical conditions such as the respiratory diseases and cancer, and children are no exception, Faith is included in this group of people. Researchers at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology reported that in one of the communities that have been affected by gas flaring such as Obrikom, the residents of Igwuruta, have a high rate of occurrence of medically occurring afflictions such as eye and skin irritations.

A 2017 study discovered that residents living in gas flaring host villages in the Niger Delta were 1.75 times more hypertensive than those living in non-oil and gas exploration towns. In 2011, Raimi Morufu Olalekan, a community medicine lecturer at Niger Delta University, researched the properties of groundwater in the Obrikom community by comparing the community's water quality metrics to suggested criteria. The examination revealed that the water in the area included higher levels of magnesium, iron, and heavy metals such as cadmium, lead, chromium, and nickel than was permitted. According to the survey, community people who drink water from boreholes drilled within their community are more likely to acquire medical disorders such as kidney failure, lung cancer, airway troubles, heart problems, asthma, and nasal passage illnesses, among others.

Obrikom air is not as safe as it must be. The fact that the flare stack is billowing fire all the time implies that the community air is contaminated, and subsequently, it exposes the residents to high risk, Raimi explains.

Build-up of pollution in our environment has been contributed by gas flaring; Raimi argues. It has aggravated the occurrence of particulate matter in society. This poses a great risk especially to asthmatic people.”

Findings

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria has been severely impacted by climate change and oil extraction activities, with women bearing a significant brunt of the consequences.

Health Impacts

Women in the Niger Delta are exposed to high levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in their blood due to oil exploration, leading to severe health challenges. Oil spills and gas flaring have contaminated water sources, soil, and air, resulting in increased rates of respiratory diseases, skin conditions, and other health problems. Pregnant women and children are particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of oil extraction, with studies indicating high levels of infant mortality linked to oil pollution.

Livelihood Impacts

Oil extraction activities have destroyed farmlands, fisheries, and other natural resources, leading to loss of livelihoods for women who depend on these resources. Women in the Niger Delta have reported significant declines in crop yields, with yam and cassava harvests shrinking due to soil contamination with crude oil. The destruction of ecosystems has forced women to seek alternative livelihoods, often in hazardous conditions, such as artisanal refining of oil.

Environmental Degradation

Oil spills and gas flaring have devastated the Niger Delta's ecosystem, with mangrove swamps severely affected and large areas destroyed or at risk due to pollution. The region's waterways are contaminated with hydrocarbons, negatively impacting fish populations and water quality. Deforestation and land degradation have resulted from oil extraction activities, exacerbating environmental problems.

Conclusion

The paper examined the various consequences of oil and gas exploration to women in Niger-Delta. The evidence of research findings available revealed that good, as well as bad impacts of oil and gas exploration on women have been experienced.

The Nigerian Delta region has been greatly affected by climate change and oil mining activities, and women are the ones bearing the major, unfair price. The lives and health of women are adversely affected in a number of ways such as exposure to toxic materials, losing of jobs, and environmental degradation. In order to minimize these effects, there is a need to give women a priority on health, livelihoods and participation in decisions-making. Immediate intervention is needed to deal with the effects of the exploitation of oilfield to the environment and livelihood and provide a sustainable development and to guarantee fairness and equality in the Niger delta towards women. This is achievable by co-ordination of policy reforms, community engagement as well as business responsibility. A holistic approach to the management of underlying issues is crucial to safeguard women health, livelihoods, and well-being in Niger Delta.

Shell has been refusing to divest out of fossil fuels, and is pushing the world towards climate disaster, in which some regions of the world will become virtually uninhabitable, and communities in the poorest parts of the planet will bear the brunt of it.

The terrible effects of the climate crisis experienced in the Niger Delta are not abstract: people know well what extracting companies such as Shell cost in terms of decimated livelihoods, homes destroyed, and devastated communities in order to satisfy their profit margins, leaving a legacy of deep-seated poverty, pollution, destruction and rights violations.

Recommendations

Giving that women play crucial roles and are definitely needed as copartners with men to drive the economy of Niger-Delta, drastic effort should be made to adequately empower them. In that regard it is proposed as follows:

- i) Oil companies must be made to accept responsibility for cleaning up pollution and repairing the environment, there is a pressing need for this.
- ii) The Nigerian government and international organisations must work together to address the environmental and health impacts of oil extraction in the Niger Delta.
- iii) Women's participation in decision-making processes is crucial to ensure that their concerns and needs are addressed.
- iv) Communities in the Niger Delta have utilized Nigerian and UK courts to seek reparations from Shell. In 2015, the oil company agreed to a £55 million settlement to compensate 15,600 people in Bodo after repeated oil disasters ravaged the community.

- (v) To minimize the increasing rate of unemployment, the oil companies are expected to play active roles. Oil companies should set up skill acquisition centres where women can be trained in various vocations. Micro credit should be given to the women to enable them engage in one business or the other such as fish farming, tailoring, boat transportation, amongst others.
- (vi) The important thing that will enable the development and empowerment of any society is education and even the women need to be provided with equal educational opportunities as men. Therefore, the state budgets ought to reserve higher percentages in order to give quality education with emphasis to the field of Information Technology.

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