

Effect of Oil Exploration on Socio-Cultural Issues in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of oil exploration on socio-cultural issues in Oguta local government area of Imo State, Nigeria. Cluster sampling technique was used to select 316 respondents for this study. Information on the objectives of this study was elicited from the sampled respondents through a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as the mean, frequency distribution, percentage and Likert scale. Multiple responses were recorded in terms of environmental challenges posed by oil exploration in the area. Problems such as loss of source of livelihood, community clashes and intra and inter-community violence, loss of community norms, destruction of historical sites of importance, sexual pervasiveness, decrease in longevity and infant mortality and inequality/inferiority complex were regarded as serious socio-cultural problems in the area. Strengthening of Social Impact Assessment within the EIA process in Nigeria, as well as an upgrade to Strategic Environmental Assessment to address socio-cultural issues in policies and plans is recommended for the Government, while the management of oil companies should liaise with members of the host communities on ways to restore and preserve the traditions of their host community.

Keywords: *Oil Exploration, Socio-Cultural Issues, Oil Companies, Oguta and Likert Scale.*

INTRODUCTION

The petroleum industry has been widely known to sustain the Nigerian economy, since it replaced the agricultural sector. About 85% of Nigeria's revenue is accounted for by the oil sector (George, 2006). Activities in the oil sector in recent times have been associated with substantial environmental degradation and social crises. And this poses a potential threat to sustainable development in the Niger Delta where the bulk of the country's petroleum resources are located (Orubu, Odusola and Ewharieme, 2004). Though oil and other natural resources are considered to be national assets in some countries of the world, yet this is not the case in Nigeria. The wide dichotomy of oil wealth and scarcity of social benefits has come to be

known as ‘The Oil Curse’ (Birdsall and Subramanin, 2004). According to world report, thirty four less developed countries are rich in mineral and oil resources 33% of these countries have per capita income that remains less than \$1 a day (Alabi and Ntukekpo, 2012). According to Birdsall and Subramanin (2004) three explanations have been adduced for these anomalies. First they explain that fluctuations in global prices create dangerous unpredictable economic cycles so that government cannot plan for social development, particularly when they spend widely in times of economic boom and simply run dry when the oil prices fall, leading to economic strain. Their second explanation is known as the ‘Dutch Disease’. This happens when resources are discovered and the country becomes a strong economy, as a result the economy becomes stronger and its products become expensive in the world market, the outcome is usually lower export and hence lesser revenue, the country then suffers from economic slump with its accompanying fallouts.

The third and probably the most important explanation is the lack of strong political and economic institutions in the resource rich countries. Of those that are democratic, only Ecuador, Sao Tome and Principe, Trinidad and Tobago are in the top half of freedom houses world ranking of political freedom (Birdsall and Subramanin; 2004). Some researchers have also argued that countries that depend hugely on oil and mineral extractions are more likely to suffer civil conflicts and also their economic growth have been lower than natural resource poor nations. However, the crude oil in Nigeria is derived from the Niger Delta area which is made up of nine States (Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Edo, Imo, Abia and Ondo). These have an estimated population of 28 million amounting to 16.7% of the Nigerian population (Emmanuel, 2004).

Some of these areas have suffered the dire effects of oil exploration with its attendant environmental degradation (Okonkwo, 2011). And these have paved way to social unrest and hostility of the indigent communities which takes the form of pipeline vandalization, kidnapping, shutting down of oil installations, militancy, intra and inter-community violence etc. In line with Chapter 26 of Agenda 21 which urges that “in view of the inter-relationship between the natural environment, and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic and physical well-being of indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities”; this study examines the land acquisition patterns, environmental challenges and effects of oil exploration on socio-cultural issues in Imo State.

METHOD

The study was carried out in Oguta Local Government Area. It is located in Imo State of Nigeria and shares boundaries with Anambra, Delta and Rivers States.

Oguta is the headquarters of the Oguta Local Government Area and one of the two crude oil producing Local Government Areas in Imo State. It is a socio-geographic town with a surface area of approximately 2,025.75 square kilometers. Fishing and farming are the major and traditional occupations of the Oguta people (ISGR, 2012). Cluster sampling technique was used to select respondents from the two oil producing communities in Oguta which are Oguta Town and Ezi-Orsu. Copies of structured questionnaire were administered in a 4:1 ratio according to the difference in population size of the two communities; hence Oguta Town was issued a total of 316 copies of questionnaire, while a total of 79 questionnaires were issued in Ezi-Orsu. Out of this sample the study found only 245 and 71 valid responses in Oguta Town and Ezi-Orsu, thereby giving a total of 316 responses useful for data analyses. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and other appropriate tools. Land acquisition patterns and environmental challenges were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as the mean, frequency distribution and percentage. Effects of oil exploration on socio-cultural issues were analyzed using the Likert Scaling Method of 5 Point scale which range from:

5	=	Very Serious,
4	=	Serious,
3	=	Undecided,
2	=	Less Serious,
1	=	Not Serious.

The scaling gave a mean of 3.0; factors with mean score equal to or above 3.0 were regarded as major effects of oil exploration on socio-cultural issues and vice versa.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that a majority of the respondents, 40.2% obtained their land through rent/lease, while 21.8%, 31.3% and 6.6% acquired their land through inheritance, purchase and gifts respectively. This is indicative of an influx into the area of non-indigenous persons as well as forced migration of indigenes from their ancestral homes corroborating further the assertion by Eregha and Irughe (2009) that there is a large influx of non-indigenous persons into the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta area. Table 2 shows that multiple responses were recorded in terms of environmental challenges posed by oil exploration in the study area.

Land, water and air pollution accounted for 69.3%, 98.7% and 68.4% respectively. These statistics corroborate the high ranking given by Agboola and Olurin (2003) to water and land pollution in environmental resource degradation in the Niger Delta region. Table 3 shows that among the socio-cultural problems associated with oil exploration in the area, problems such as impoverishment/poverty, invasion of traditional customs, lack of empowerment from oil companies

and lack of proper consultation with community members prior to development are not regarded as serious socio-cultural problems caused by oil exploration activities in the study area. This is because their mean values are less than the standard mean value of 3.0 which is the judging mean value. However other problems such as loss of source of livelihood is rated very serious, this is because the community which in time past was a largely agrarian society has been deprived of the limited farmlands and water sources for crop cultivation, fishing and marine activities due to pollution and other inimical practices by oil companies which operate in the area.

Another problem rated as serious is community clashes and internecine violence which gave mean values of 4.02 greater than the standard mean value of 3.0. This implies that the presence of oil companies in the area have caused an upsurge in community clashes and violence among host communities which may have been caused by non meeting of demands of the host communities by the oil companies. This corroborates the assertion of Eregha and Irughe (2009), that oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta regions are closely associated with cultural and social unrest such as intra- conflict, youth restiveness, pipe-line vandalization, hostage taking and kidnapping etc. Loss of community norms and values show a mean value of 3.36 and is greater than the standard mean value of 3.0, thus is noted as a serious problem. This indicates that the influx of non indigenous oil workers and some extent of associated materialism have caused to a large extent the degradation of traditional community norms and values. Closely associated with oil exploration and mining activities is bush clearing and burning, the survey indicates that the destruction of historical sites of importance is a major socio-cultural problem to the people of Oguta, the problem obtained a mean score of 4.01. This activity has the potential to adversely affect the psychology of the people in the area and may result in hostile attitude towards the perceived source of the destruction.

Sexual pervasiveness and decrease in longevity and infant mortality gave mean scores of 3.57 and 3.84 respectively and were thus designated as serious socio-cultural problems in the area, the increase in promiscuity may be associated with materialism which is associated with migration of oil workers and groups into the area (Uyigüe and Agho, 2007). They further state that sexual promiscuity is closely associated with high outbreak of HIV/AIDS epidemic which is a major problem linked with oil exploration in the Niger Delta region as a whole. Decrease in longevity and infant mortality proves to be a problem with the community even with perceived global improvement in health care facilities, this may be associated with air and water borne diseases associated with air and water pollution. This further corroborates the work of Obasi (2007) who states that the sparse population patterns which are observed in the area are due to emission of poisonous gases such as sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide which has caused among other things increase in cataracts, skin rashes and miscarriages among pregnant mothers, also the incidence of bronchitis is closely associated with gas flaring activities. Inferiority

complex among indigenes gave a mean score of 3.98; this may be as a result of some of the other socio-cultural problems discussed such as destruction of their historical sites of importance, loss of means of livelihood and tendency of majority of indigenes in the employment of the oil companies to be employed in lower cadres and thus perform more menial jobs than other groups. The grand mean of the distribution is 3.236 ± 1.265 ; this gave a percentage of seriousness of 64.7%. This implies that about 64.7% seriousness of the socio-cultural problems are caused by oil exploration in the area.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to land acquisition patterns

Land Acquisition	Frequency	Percentage
Inheritance	69	21.8
Rent/Lease	127	40.2
Purchase	99	31.3
Gift	21	6.6
Total	316	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to environmental challenges posed by oil exploration in the study area

Environmental Challenges	**Frequency	Percentage
Land Pollution	219	69.3
Water Pollution	312	98.7
Air Pollution	216	68.4

Source: Field Survey, 2013 ** Multiple responses observed

Table 3: Effects of oil exploration on socio-cultural issues in Oguta

Socio-cultural problems	ΣF_x	ΣF	Mean	Remark
Impoverishment/Poverty	758	316	2.40	Not Serious
Loss of source of livelihood	1315	316	4.16	Very Serious
Invasion of traditional customs and rites	660	316	2.09	Not Serious
Community clashes and internecine violence	1270	316	4.02	Very Serious
Loss of community norms and values	1062	316	3.36	Serious
Destruction of historical sites of importance	1267	316	4.01	Very Serious
Sexual pervasiveness	1128	316	3.57	Serious
Decrease in longevity and infant mortality	1213	316	3.84	Serious
No empowerment from oil companies	664	316	2.1	Not Serious
Lack of consultation with community members before development	654	316	2.07	Not Serious
Inequality/Inferiority complex	1258	316	3.98	Serious
Grand mean \pm std = 3.236 ± 1.265	Percentage of seriousness = 64.7%			

Source: Field Survey 2013

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study as reported in this work, it suffices to say that the activities of the of oil companies operating in Oguta has caused some measure of havoc and at the same time eroded on the socio-cultural fabric of the host community which has resulted in social unrest in the area. Based on this the following recommendations were made; The oil companies should stand up to their social responsibilities towards addressing the aforementioned issues in Oguta area and should most urgently liase with members of the host communities on ways of creating an enabling environment for the Oguta community to protect and uphold their culture and traditional practices while ensuring good morals and psychological well-being of the community members. Similarly the Nation also should realize the part which it has to play in achieving the aims of sustainable development; and as highlighted in Agenda 21 should be cautious in its development drive and duly support the identity, culture and interest of indigenous ethnic communities to enable their participation in achieving the aims of sustainable development. This should be duly enforced for compliance with the oil companies operating in the region.

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