

Chapter 23

Environmental Degradation and Its Implication for Environmental Sustainability in the Niger Delta

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ABSTRACT

There is a high level of abasement and decadence in the ecological and biosphere of the Niger Delta, Nigeria, due to gas flaring and oil bunkering, often carried out by illegal bunkers around the region. This has resulted to pipeline damages, caused environmental pollution, and played down on the ethical and developmental strategies of the nation. This chapter maintains that these illegal and unethical activities often carried out by both indigenes and non-indigenes, on both government and multinational companies' investments, are the reasons for environmental degradation, debasement, and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta. It further points out the causes and effects of oil bunkering in the Niger Delta and shows the need for the application of environmental ethic, to bear on the discourse on environmental degradation. This will serve as a moral code to the actors and perpetrators of the said illegal bunkery businesses and secure and sustain environment for human beings, plants, and animals within and outside the region. This chapter used conversational method to drive home its points.

INTRODUCTION

Niger Delta region (NDR) of Nigeria has not been the same since the discovery of oil in its soil in 1956. The activities of the Royal Dutch Shell (RDS), British petroleum (Shell BP), legal and illegal bunkers, in the angle of oil exploration and exploitation have increased the mineral or black gold, for the benefit of the companies and Nigeria at large, but have caused more harm than good to the people of Niger Delta region, as their environment is shattered, polluted and degraded. Ekanem et al. (2010) corroborated this when he observes that the discovery and production of oil in Niger Delta (ND) brought a tremendous

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change to the region. “The region has ever since, not been the same, as the oil (black gold) has brought a lot of money to the Nigerian state resulting in a near total neglect and detriment of the area”. Sheriff Folarin & Henry Okodua (2009) and Snapps 2011) concurred to this fact, when they aver that “the persistent anthropogenic human activities and regular emission of carbon dioxide and oil pollution, arising from the activities in the petroleum industry has contaminated the land, fishing waters and atmosphere in the Niger Delta, leading to almost total collapse of the local economy”. There exist high level of environmental degradation such as soil pollution, flooding, climate change, desertification, erosion etc., which makes it difficult for the growth and development of the region’s agricultural products. These agricultural products are affected due to frequent oil spillage, water pollution and soil pollution that are hazardous to the environment (Inyang 2019). These environmental decadences, which include; oil spillage, water pollution and soil pollution have resulted to severe nutrient depletion, poor crop and harvest, environmental degradation and obstruction of biodiversity in the region (Binraban, 2012). As a matter of fact, land pressure and aggravated laden tension and insensitivity of the Nigerian government to the yearning of people of the region are reasons for the decline in food production, within the geographical area. Apart from the catastrophe done on the agricultural dividends, human beings, plants and animals are adversely affected too.

Furthermore, environmental degradation is today seen as being more dangerous than war. This is because as war is a threat against human beings, environmental degradation is a threat against human beings, animals and plants. No wonder why “the United Nations has identified environmental degradation as one of six clustered threats with which the world must be concerned now and decades ahead” (UNO, 2004) Environmental degradation is the obstruction or destruction inflicted on the environment that affects and brings about depletion of resources such as ecosystem, biosphere, wildlife, water, soil, air and habitants. By Implication, any disintegration or deterioration of the environment that kicks against the ecological or bionomical order of the habitants is regarded as environmental degradation. Niger Delta communities (NDCs), where the oil and gas production primarily take place in Nigeria hardly benefit from the huge oil income, yet these communities are most degradable and affected, as their means of livelihood such as fishing, farming and conducive environment are deprived of them. A justification of this was made by Oguduvwe (2013) Oluduro & Oluduro 2012), who contend that Niger Delta indigenes have not gotten anything tangible from the multinational oil corporations (MNOCs), and have suffered terribly as a result of the persistent emission and gas flaring in the land. These adverse social, environmental deprivation and marginalisation led to the agitations and endless protests. In a bid to address the issue (s) that orchestrated the said protests, once and for all, Nigerian government established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, as a form of government compensation scheme (Osamuyimen, 2020). The scheme under discussion has never worked, due to bribery and corruption in the commission.

This paper sets out to employ environmental ethics, for environmental sustainability and development in Nigeria (Niger Delta). This will help both illegal and legal oil bunkers in NDR to be human centric, animal centric, bio centric and ecologically holistic. It is only when they are conscious of these ethical roadmaps that they can conserve, use and secure for all Nigerians in general and Niger Delta people in particular, a quality environment adequate for their health and wellbeing, for benefit of the present and future generations. In the first section of this paper, I will bring to bear the social and economic perspectives of oil in Niger Delta. There, I shall argue that though, Niger Delta is seen as the oil-well of Nigeria, it is adversely affected by the activities of the multinational companies in the region socially and economically. And that the only way out of these menaces is through strict adherence to the principle of

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