

Youth Activism and Resource Extraction Conflicts in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study specifically examines the profound connection between youth activism and resource extraction conflicts in Rivers State, Nigeria. It posits that youth activism, with its significant impact on these disputes, not only shapes the region's social and political landscape but also advocates for sustainable development and community well-being. The study, employing a literature review approach, scrutinizes academic publications, reports, and online sources to explore the diverse roles of young people in driving positive change. It utilizes social movement and frustration-aggression theories to comprehend the motivations and strategies of youth activists. Focusing on Rivers State as a case study, the research examines movements like the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the #StopTheGasFlare campaign. These cases vividly illustrate the evolution of youth activism tactics and impact, from community mobilization and global lobbying to utilizing social media to garner public support. Key findings suggest that youth engagement fosters environmental conservation, community empowerment, and policy reform. The study proposes solutions to enhance the sustainability and impact of youth activism, including forming partnerships, expanding strategies, and promoting collaboration across different age groups. It concludes by advocating for empowering young people through strategic partnerships, diverse tactics, and cross-generational collaboration. This research underscores the potential of youth activism to inspire change in resolving resource extraction conflicts and proposes strategies to amplify their voices.

Keywords: Youth Activism, Niger Delta, Resource Extraction, Resilience and Social Change.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Rivers State, in Nigeria's southern Niger Delta, is rich and complex (Mbalu & Takyi, 2022). Diverse ethnic groups, like the Ijaw and Ogoni, originally inhabited the region (Nwaogu, 2019). European arrival in the 15th century, followed by British colonial rule from the 19th century, led to exploitation through the slave trade and palm oil extraction (Ibaba, S.I., 2009). Resistance movements inevitably emerged against these colonial practices (Arowolo & Akpan, 2023). After Nigerian independence in 1960, the region became part of the Eastern Region until the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) led to the creation of Rivers State in 1967 (Moyo & Mbong, 2021).

Oil production boomed in the 1970s, enriching Nigeria but causing significant environmental degradation and uneven development in Rivers State (Nwosu, E.I., 2023). This economic disparity spurred activism, with movements like the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) fighting against environmental damage (Okonkwo, C., 2023). The more recent #StopTheGasFlare movement advocates the end of harmful gas-flaring practices (Robinson, P., 2023). Despite its oil wealth, Rivers State grapples with poverty, inequality, and environmental challenges (Earl et al.; H., 2023). This complex situation reflects the long-lasting impact of historical forces shaping this region.

Youth activism, defined as the initiative-driven involvement of young individuals in advocating for social or political change through organized efforts and collective action (Morrow, 2018), plays a crucial role in contemporary social movements.

This study explored the critical connection between youth activism and the conflicts arising from resource extraction in Rivers State. The growing impact of young people in promoting environmental sustainability, social justice, and community empowerment, particularly in areas affected by resource extraction operations, fuels this investigation (Moyo & Mbong, 2021; Arowolo & Akpan, 2023). This study contends that youth activism significantly influences resource extraction disputes in Rivers State. This influence shapes the region's social and political landscape, advocating for sustainable development and fostering community well-being.

Statement of the Problem

Rivers State, like much of the Niger Delta, faces significant challenges due to resource extraction, particularly oil and gas. These activities have resulted in environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and the social marginalization of local communities (Nwankwo, 2020; Okonkwo, 2022). There has been a surge in youth activism focused on environmental and social justice issues (Abimbola & Odugbemi, 2020; Robinson, 2023). This research aims to understand the connection between this flourishing youth activism and the ongoing conflicts surrounding resource extraction in Rivers State. By examining this relationship, the study seeks to determine how youth activism impacts the region's social and political dynamics and whether it can contribute to sustainable development and improve community well-being.

Aim and Objectives

Aim

This study aims to comprehensively examine the intricate relationship between youth activism and resource extraction conflicts in Rivers State, Nigeria, and assess youth-led initiatives' potential in fostering sustainable development and enhancing community well-being within the region.

Objectives

Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. Understand conflicts and youth activism; Rivers State's resource extraction history, including colonial legacy, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequality, will be analyzed.
- ii. Evaluate Rivers State's youth activism, including protests, community mobilization, advocacy campaigns, and digital activism, and assess how well it addresses resource extraction issues.
- iii. Examine how youth activism affects resource extraction disputes, policy changes, business practices, and community empowerment and assess its potential to promote sustainable development and well-being in Rivers State.

Research Questions

- i. How has the historical context of resource extraction in Rivers State, including the colonial legacy, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequalities, shaped youth activism and contributed to conflict dynamics?
- ii. What are the diverse forms and strategies of youth activism employed in Rivers State to address resource extraction conflicts, and how practical are these approaches in achieving their goals?
- iii. What is the impact of youth activism on resource extraction conflicts in Rivers State, particularly about policy changes, corporate practices, community empowerment, sustainable development, and overall well-being?

Significance of the Study

This study focuses specifically on Rivers State, offering a unique case study within the broader Niger Delta region. Rivers State has witnessed its own set of struggles with resource extraction and the environmental and

social consequences it brings (Nwaogu, 2019). Gaining insight into the significance of young activism in tackling these difficulties within Rivers State is essential for formulating efficient approaches to advance sustainable development, safeguard the environment, and uphold social justice in the region.

Conceptual Review:

This conceptual review examined the complex interplay between youth activism and resource extraction conflicts in Rivers State, Nigeria. Drawing on various scholarly sources provides a foundation for further analysis of this critical issue.

Historical Context and Underlying Grievances

Understanding the historical background of youth activism necessitates examining the long-lasting impacts of colonialism (Nwankwo, 2020; Obi & Okonkwo, 2022). Colonial resource extraction systems prioritized foreign interests, fostering a sense of dispossession and injustice among Indigenous communities (Nwaogu, 2019). This, coupled with socio-economic marginalization and environmental degradation (Arowolo & Akpan, 2023), laid the groundwork for historical patterns of unrest and contemporary youth activism (Ibaba, 2009).

A key factor fueling youth activism is alienation from the benefits of resource extraction. Studies by Nwosu (2023) and Robinson (2023) highlight the multifaceted nature of alienation. This includes environmental degradation stripping communities of their livelihoods, political marginalization hindering agency, and economic inequalities exacerbating the contrast between resource wealth and local poverty (Moyo & Mbong, 2021). Examining the link between alienation and militancy is crucial for comprehending the complex dynamics driving youth activism and conflict in Rivers State.

The review examined the role of youth movements and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Earl et al. (2023) emphasizes the impact of leadership dynamics within youth movements on their effectiveness. Critically analyzing the efficacy of CSR programs (Moyo & Mbong, 2021) exposes limitations and underscores the need for community-oriented approaches (N'daba et al., 2023). Arowolo and Akpan (2023) further emphasize the importance of tailoring CSR initiatives to the specific needs of rural farmers in host communities.

Resource governance plays a significant role in shaping youth activism. N'daba et al. (2023) examine how neglecting community concerns and fostering feelings of inequity through oil industry practices can contribute to conflict. Understanding the interplay between resource management practices and youth activism is crucial for addressing the root causes of conflict.

The study acknowledged the multifaceted nature of conflict beyond oil extraction. Studies by Nwosu (2023) explore the impact on women's livelihoods and maritime piracy. Juris et al. (2020) investigate the potential of social innovation for sustainable development. Additionally, the review considers the influence of cultural tourism, occult practices, and religion on youth conflict (Robinson, 2023) and the effectiveness of post-amnesty employment programs for former militants (Ibaba, 2009).

The paper critically examined government policies addressing environmental conflicts (Earl et al., 2023). It also explores the challenges posed by maritime piracy (Nwosu, 2023) and the creation of value-generating spaces in the region (N'daba et al., 2023). Analyzing the efficacy of the amnesty program as a peacebuilding tool (Ibaba, 2009) and the emotional dynamics of violence and conflict (Abimbola & Odugbemi, 2020) provides further insights into potential solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current body of research on youth activism in conflicts related to resource extraction demonstrates a comprehensive and dynamic comprehension of young people's involvement in campaigning for social and environmental justice. While certain individuals emphasized achievements, others delved into the intricacies and obstacles youthful activists encounter.

Earl et al.'s (2023) study underscores the significant impact of young activism on social movements, emphasizing the crucial role of their political indoctrination, involvement in movement groups, and utilization of various strategies. This is consistent with the research conducted by Juris et al. (2020), who highlight the growing influence of youth-led movements on political transformation and, more especially, environmental justice.

Nevertheless, research conducted by Bannon and Collier (2018) provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between youth bulges and conflict. Their findings indicate that conflict intensity is driven by resource wealth rather than simply by the presence of large young populations. Similarly, the work by Ide (2022) questions the oversimplified notion that natural resources are the sole cause of conflict, highlighting the intricate interaction of economic, political, and social elements.

Morgan and Berrang-Ford (2022) present a more positive viewpoint, highlighting the benefits of involving young people in climate change and resource extraction conversations. They emphasize the significance of including inclusion and a wide range of opinions from young people in developing solutions. In the same vein, N'daba et al. (2023) emphasize the influential role of environmental activism led by young people in bringing about significant and profound changes in regions devastated by war.

However, it is vital to acknowledge young people's difficulties. Hrnčić and Marčetić-Radunović (2021) investigate the scarcity of resources accessible to young individuals in areas affected by war, highlighting the necessity for focused assistance and empowerment. This aligns with the research conducted by Mbalu and Takyi (2022), which emphasizes the susceptibility of young individuals to being manipulated and exploited in areas affected by war.

Justice and Okpo (2023) investigated the relationship between youth uprising and economic insecurity in Idu-Ekpeye, an oil-producing community in Rivers State, Nigeria. Their research revealed that the persistent poverty and misery experienced by the community, despite decades of oil extraction, fueled youth unrest. They also found that the community's peaceful attempts to engage with the oil company were met with resistance from state security forces, exacerbating the situation. The study primarily relied on primary sources and descriptive analysis, concluding that the youth uprising has significant economic implications and recommending economic empowerment programs as a potential solution.

While Justice and Okpo (2023) provide valuable insights into the specific case of Idu-Ekpeye, their research leaves a gap in understanding the broader context of youth activism and resource extraction conflicts across Rivers State. This current study aims to address this gap by examining the diverse forms and strategies of youth activism across the state, employing robust theoretical frameworks to analyze the complex dynamics of youth activism and resource conflicts, and exploring a more comprehensive range of potential solutions and peacebuilding strategies beyond economic empowerment. By adopting a broader scope, incorporating theoretical frameworks like social movement theory and frustration-aggression theory, and conducting comparative analyses, this study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of youth activism and resource extraction conflicts in Rivers State. Furthermore, it will offer nuanced insights into the potential of youth activism to drive positive change and promote sustainable development in the region.

The existing body of literature on research regarding youth activism in conflicts related to resource extraction presents a dynamic portrayal, encompassing both the possibility for transformation and intricate challenges. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these varied viewpoints is essential for promoting the successful involvement of young people in the pursuit of social and environmental justice in communities impacted by resource extraction.

Youth activists in Rivers State employ diverse strategies to address resource extraction conflicts. Okpo and Abam (2023) emphasize the importance of conflict resolution strategies in fostering worker commitment within oil companies operating in the region. Similarly, Adimora et al. (2023) highlight the role of crisis management and conflict resolution strategies in mitigating the negative impact of conflicts on businesses in

Rivers State. Furthermore, research indicates that effective mentoring strategies can enhance the success of entrepreneurial ventures in the region (Onyishi & Okoye, 2023). These findings collectively suggest that a multi-faceted approach encompassing conflict resolution, crisis management, and mentoring can empower youth activists in Rivers State to navigate the complex landscape of resource extraction conflicts and contribute to sustainable development amidst challenging socio-economic conditions (Okpo & Abam, 2023; Adimora et al., 2023; Onyishi & Okoye, 2023).

Theoretical Framework:

This study utilizes two key theoretical frameworks to analyze youth activism in response to resource extraction conflicts in Rivers State, Nigeria:

Social Movement Theory (SMT)

SMT provides a valuable lens for understanding the mobilization of young people against resource extraction conflicts. It emphasizes the collective nature of social movements, highlighting how young people in Rivers State collaborate to achieve social and environmental justice (Juris et al., 2020). This collaboration can take various forms, from establishing organizations like the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) to utilizing social media to build connections and a shared identity (Abimbola & Odugbemi, 2020).

SMT sheds light on how grievances like environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and political marginalization unite diverse young people, fostering unity and collective power (Moyo & Mbong, 2021). It also explores how exposure to social injustices, community activism, and alternative narratives shapes young people's political consciousness and drives their involvement in social movements (Earl et al., 2023). The study will examine the diverse strategies employed by young activists, including protests, community mobilization, legal actions, and digital campaigns, each with unique advantages and challenges in influencing decision-makers and raising public awareness (Robinson, 2023).

Furthermore, SMT focuses on the power dynamics within social movements, particularly how young activists in Rivers State confront powerful entities like multinational corporations and the government (N'daba et al., 2023). The theory examines how individuals and groups navigate power imbalances, construct alternative narratives, and utilize tactics to achieve their goals, such as enhancing accountability, implementing environmental regulations, and securing community benefits from resource extraction.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of SMT in the Rivers State context. The theory may not fully capture the complexities of internal movement dynamics, diverse motivations, and the influence of cultural factors (Arowolo & Akpan, 2023). Nevertheless, SMT's flexibility allows for integrating perspectives from frameworks like postcolonial theory to address historical power imbalances and the cultural dimensions of resource extraction conflicts.

Frustration-Aggression Theory (FAT)

Frustration-Aggression Theory (FAT), proposed by Dollard et al. (1939), argues that unmet needs and a sense of injustice lead to frustration, which can manifest as aggressive behavior. Young people in Rivers State confront numerous challenges stemming from resource extraction, including environmental degradation (Nwankwo, 2020), economic disparity despite abundant resources (Nwaogu, 2019), and social and political marginalization (Okonkwo, 2022).

Research by Ibaba (2009) and Nwosu (2023) highlights the significant alienation and dissatisfaction caused by environmental damage, corruption, and exclusion from political processes. These factors contribute to conflict and violence in the region, aligning with FAT's notion of frustration as a motivator for youth activism.

However, FAT's focus on direct aggression as the sole outcome of frustration is overly simplistic. Mbalu and Takyi's (2022) research suggests that frustration can also channel into constructive actions like political participation and social movements. Abimbola and Odugbemi (2020) and Robinson (2023) further illustrate

how young people in Rivers State express their dissatisfaction through various forms of activism, such as protests, legal actions, and social media campaigns.

Recognizing the limitations of applying FAT universally is crucial. Intersectionality matters. Due to overlapping inequalities, young women and marginalized groups in Rivers State may experience distinct frustrations and express their discontent differently (N'daba et al., 2023).

Furthermore, historical context and cultural influences significantly impact how individuals respond to frustration. FAT may not fully capture these complexities, necessitating frameworks like postcolonial theory for a deeper understanding.

While FAT offers insights into the psychological roots of youth involvement in conflicts, as shown in Ibaba's (2009) research, it is vital to consider broader implications. Soremi's (2020) research on oil theft highlights resource extraction's economic and social consequences, exacerbating discontent and fueling conflict dynamics.

While FAT provides valuable insights, a more nuanced understanding of youth activism in Rivers State requires acknowledging its limitations and incorporating other frameworks. Considering intersectionality, historical context, and the range of strategies employed by young people is essential. By doing so, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between frustration, agency, and the diverse tactics young people utilize in pursuing justice and sustainable development in the face of resource extraction conflicts.

Implications of Social Movement Theory (SMT) on Youth Activism and Resource Extraction Conflicts in Rivers State:

Social Movement Theory (SMT) provides a robust framework for understanding youth-led activism in response to resource extraction conflicts in Rivers State. It emphasizes the collective nature of these movements, highlighting how young people collaborate to achieve social and environmental justice, as seen in the formation of organizations like MOSOP and the use of social media platforms to build solidarity (Juris et al., 2020; Abimbola & Odugbemi, 2020). SMT explains how shared grievances, such as environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and political marginalization, unite diverse groups of young people, fostering collective power (Moyo & Mbong, 2021). According to SMT, this collective power can be leveraged to challenge existing power structures and advocate for change.

However, as Arowolo and Akpan (2023) note, SMT may not fully capture the nuances of internal movement dynamics, the diverse motivations of participants, and the influence of cultural factors in the Rivers State context. For instance, while SMT explains how shared grievances unite activists, it may not fully account for the role of cultural traditions or spiritual beliefs in shaping activism.

Implications of Frustration-Aggression Theory (FAT) on Youth Activism and Resource Extraction Conflicts in Rivers State:

Frustration-Aggression Theory (FAT) offers a psychological perspective on youth activism, suggesting that unmet needs and perceived injustice resulting from resource extraction activities lead to frustration, which can manifest as aggression (Dollard et al., 1939). This is supported by research by Ibaba (2009) and Nwosu (2023), which highlight the significant alienation and dissatisfaction among young people in Rivers State due to environmental damage, corruption, and political exclusion.

However, FAT's focus on aggression as the primary outcome of frustration is overly simplistic. Research by Mbalu and Takyi (2022) suggests that frustration can lead to constructive actions like political participation and social movements. This is evident in Rivers State, where youth have channelled their frustrations into various forms of activism, such as protests, legal actions, and digital campaigns (Abimbola & Odugbemi, 2020; Robinson, 2023).

Moreover, FAT does not fully account for the diverse ways frustration is experienced and expressed, especially among marginalized groups like young women in Rivers State (N'daba et al., 2023). The theory also neglects the influence of historical context and cultural factors on responses to frustration.

Both SMT and FAT provide valuable insights into youth activism in Rivers State, but their limitations must be acknowledged. By integrating these theories with perspectives from postcolonial theory and intersectionality, we can better understand the complex interplay between frustration, agency, and the diverse strategies young people employ in their fight for justice and sustainable development.

Comparative Analysis Table

| Aspect | Description | Examples |
|-------------|---|--|
| Focus Areas | Environmental protection, community empowerment, policy change | Ending gas flaring practices (e.g., #StopTheGasFlare), securing environmental remediation (e.g., MOSOP), and advocating for economic opportunities in resource extraction. |
| Strategies | Peaceful protests, community organizing, online activism (social media campaigns), legal challenges, creative advocacy (documentaries, music, art) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Street demonstrations (e.g., MOSOP protests in the early 1990s estimated to involve thousands of participants at peak) ➤ Online petitions (#StopTheGasFlare campaign gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures since its launch around 2016) ➤ Collaborations with NGOs (e.g., MOSOP collaborating with Amnesty International in the 1990s) ➤ Lawsuits against polluting companies (e.g., ongoing lawsuits against Shell by Ogoni communities - the number of cases and individuals involved can vary) ➤ Film productions raising awareness about environmental degradation (documentaries like "Peace in the Niger Delta" released in 2008 - viewership data might be limited) |
| Impact | Increased public awareness, policy discussions and changes (e.g., Ogoni Bill of Rights), community mobilization, and fostering collaboration among activists. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ International media attention on gas flaring (particularly since the rise of the #StopTheGasFlare movement around 2016 - estimated reach in millions based on potential media coverage) ➤ Debates around regulations on gas flaring intensifying in the 2020s (specific details on policy changes achieved might be limited due to ongoing discussions) ➤ Empowering communities to have a voice (e.g., MOSOP's role in raising awareness about environmental degradation in Ogoniland in the 1990s - the number of people impacted was difficult to quantify) ➤ Building networks of youth activists (#StopTheGasFlare movement collaborating with other environmental movements across Africa since the late 2010s - the number of collaborating groups and their reach can vary) |
| Challenges | Government repression, limited resources (financial and technological), corporate resistance, and internal divisions within movements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Arrests and intimidation of activists (e.g., the tragic execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists in 1995 - documented cases, but overall numbers of affected activists difficult to determine) ➤ Difficulty reaching remote communities without technology access (estimated percentage of the |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | <p>population with limited access can be researched based on development reports)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opposition from oil companies (ongoing struggle against Shell by MOSOP and other groups - details on financial resources and lobbying power of corporations challenging to quantify) ➤ Lack of unity on goals and strategies within youth movements (e.g., potential for fragmentation within the #StopTheGasFlare movement as it grows - specific instances of internal divisions might be difficult to document publicly) |
|--|--|--|

Comparative Analysis: MOSOP and #StopTheGasFlare Movement

The fight for environmental justice in Rivers State, Nigeria, has seen a powerful evolution through youth activism. This analysis compares two prominent movements: The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the #StopTheGasFlare movement.

Shared Strategies and Values:

Despite being separated by time and technology, MOSOP and #StopTheGasFlare share core values and strategies. Both prioritize peaceful protests, community organizing, and awareness campaigns to achieve their goals (Arowolo & Akpan, 2023; Abimbola & Odugbemi, 2020). Recognizing the power of international solidarity, they actively seek support through media engagement and collaboration with NGOs (Earl et al., 2023). Notably, both movements effectively utilize personal narratives and visual content to connect with audiences and raise awareness (Juris et al., 2020).

Divergent Approaches:

However, their approaches diverge based on the context of their eras. MOSOP's primary focus was pressuring the Nigerian government and Shell (Moyo & Mbong, 2021). Limited by readily available communication tools, they actively engaged in negotiations and legal challenges (Soremi, 2020). In contrast, the #StopTheGasFlare movement leverages social media for mobilization, communication, and information dissemination, targeting a broader audience, including the public, policymakers, and diverse stakeholders (Robinson, 2023).

Effectiveness and Challenges:

MOSOP: Achievements include significant international awareness, pressure on Shell, the Ogoni Bill of Rights outlining their demands, and inspiration for future movements (Okonkwo, 2023; Nwankwo, 2020). However, they faced brutal government repression, internal divisions, and limited resources, hindering long-term effectiveness and complete environmental remediation in Ogoniland (Ibaba, 2009; Nwosu, 2023).

#StopTheGasFlare: Achievements include increased public awareness, media attention, policy discussions, and community mobilization, fostering activist collaboration (Earl et al., 2023). Challenges include limited resources for campaign expansion, overcoming government inertia and corporate resistance, maintaining online momentum through constant innovation, securing concrete policy changes, and ending gas flaring (Robinson, 2023).

Shared and Diverse Responses:

Both movements have confronted similar challenges: government repression, corporate resistance, limited resources, and maintaining public engagement. However, their responses differed. MOSOP adapted and demonstrated resilience in the face of direct government violence (Ibaba, 2009). The #StopTheGasFlare movement, navigating online censorship, adapts strategies to maintain online engagement (Robinson, 2023).

Lessons Learned and Evolving Landscape of Activism

By comparing these movements, we gain insights into the evolving landscape of activism and the persistent challenges faced by those fighting for environmental and social justice in the Niger Delta. Both MOSOP and #StopTheGasFlare exemplify the efficacy of youth activism in tackling environmental injustices. Although their methods and circumstances vary, they share the need for adaptable tactics to negotiate power dynamics and achieve lasting change. The #StopTheGasFlare campaign builds upon the foundation laid by MOSOP, utilizing social media for global impact and mobilization. By learning from past victories and challenges, youth-led environmental justice movements can become even more effective in achieving a sustainable future.

METHODOLOGY

The literature review employed in this research paper investigates youth activism and conflict over resource extraction in Rivers State. This method thoroughly assesses research papers, scholarly articles and reports specific to Rivers State whenever possible. The review will encompass several sources:

- i. Peer-reviewed academic journals focusing on environmental justice, social movements, political ecology, and studies specific to Rivers State.
- ii. Online databases such as JSTOR, IJISRT, Web of Science, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar to deliver comprehensive and relevant search results for Rivers State.
- iii. Nigerian and Rivers State government publications and reports on resource extraction and environmental limitations.
- iv. Reports from NGOs with expertise in Rivers State to gain ground-level information.

The study applies social movement theory to explain power dynamics, resource mobilization, and collective action. It also applies frustration/aggression theory (FAT) to examine resource-based conflicts from a psychological and social perspective.

Case Studies:

A. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) emerged in the early 1990s as a grassroots response to decades of environmental degradation caused by oil exploration in Ogoni land. The Ogoni people, an ethnic minority, faced severe consequences like deforestation, health issues, and water and land contamination (Nwankwo, 2020).

Limited opportunities for legal recourse under a repressive military regime fueled the rise of MOSOP. The movement employed community organizing, international advocacy, and non-violent resistance to raise awareness of the environmental crisis and advocate for justice (Obi & Okonkwo, 2022). Their core demands included environmental remediation, compensation for affected livelihoods, increased political autonomy for the Ogoni people, and accountability from Shell for its operations (Moyo & Mbong, 2021).

MOSOP fostered solidarity through community organizing and non-violent demonstrations (Arowolo & Akpan, 2023; Mbalu & Takyi, 2022). To garner international support, they built relationships with human rights organizations, international media, and the United Nations (Earl et al., 2023). Legal action was pursued to seek reparation and compensation for human rights violations and environmental harm (Soremi, 2020).

Despite brutal government repression, culminating in the execution of leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists, MOSOP achieved significant milestones. Their efforts brought global attention to the plight of Ogoniland (Okonkwo, 2023), pressured Shell to acknowledge the detrimental impacts, and served as a model for subsequent environmental justice movements (Robinson, 2023). However, internal strife within MOSOP, corporate opposition from Shell, and government repression hindered their progress (Ibaba, 2009; Nwosu, 2023).

MOSOP remains a potent symbol of environmental justice advocacy, inspiring ongoing struggles against environmental degradation and corporate responsibility in the Niger Delta and beyond.

B. The #StopTheGasFlare Movement: Youth-Led Action for a Sustainable Niger Delta

The #StopTheGasFlare movement, spearheaded by young activists, has become a powerful force advocating for an end to the harmful practice of gas flaring in the Niger Delta. This campaign utilizes social media platforms to influence government officials, garner public support, and pressure energy companies to adopt cleaner technologies (Abimbola & Odugbemi, 2020).

Decades of gas flaring have plagued the Niger Delta, causing environmental and health problems (Nwankwo, 2020). Despite global commitments and regulations, the practice persists due to economic and infrastructural challenges (N'daba et al., 2023). This and persistent socio-political issues like unemployment and poverty fuel public discontent and the #StopTheGasFlare movement (Nwaogu, 2019).

The campaign highlights the adverse consequences of gas flaring, including air and water pollution that harm ecosystems and public health (Nwosu, 2023), economic loss from untapped gas potential (Mbalu & Takyi, 2022), and detrimental health impacts on communities (Moyo & Mbong, 2021).

Their goals include a complete ban on gas flaring, public education about the harmful effects, encouraging stakeholders to embrace cleaner technologies and invest in gas utilization solutions, and promoting a transition to sustainable energy practices in the Niger Delta (Earl et al., 2023).

Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are the movement's primary tools for mobilizing support and disseminating information, visuals, and narratives about the consequences of gas flaring (Robinson, 2023). The movement collaborates with international organizations, environmental NGOs, and social movements and utilizes online petitions and crowdfunding campaigns (Juris et al., 2020). Innovative media formats like documentaries, music, and art are employed to engage a wider audience and raise awareness.

The campaign has undoubtedly increased global public awareness of gas flaring. It has generated policy debates and stakeholder discussions, garnered significant media attention to maintain public pressure, and effectively mobilized communities in the Niger Delta to participate actively in advocacy efforts (Earl et al., 2023).

However, the movement faces challenges. Limited resources restrict its ability to expand its reach, and deeply entrenched interests in the oil and gas industry and regulatory hurdles create significant obstacles (Robinson, 2023). Maintaining ongoing public engagement and digital activism requires strategic communication and continuous innovation.

The #StopTheGasFlare movement exemplifies the power of social media in galvanizing youth for environmental justice in Rivers State and the Niger Delta as a whole.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS:

The study examined youth activism's influence, difficulties, and prospective paths in addressing resource extraction disputes in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Positive Impacts of Youth Activism

Environmental Protection: Youth campaigns such as #StopTheGasFlare aim to increase public knowledge about the harmful environmental effects of resource exploitation and advocate for more stringent laws and cleaner methods (Nwankwo, 2020; Robinson, 2023).

Community empowerment refers to the process of promoting activism, which encourages collective action, enhances the ability of communities to address their concerns, and leads to better living standards and resource management (Mbalu & Takyi, 2022; Arowolo & Akpan, 2023).

Policy Change: The persistent efforts of young activists have clearly impacted policy changes, such as the implementation of the Ogoni Bill of Rights and the ongoing discussions regarding limitations on gas flaring (N'daba et al., 2023; Okonkwo, 2023).

Challenges and Limitations

Government repression refers to the use of authoritarian methods such as arrests, detentions, and violence to suppress opposition and prevent the expression of dissent. MOSOP's experience (Ibaba, 2009) serves as a clear example of this difficulty.

Corporate Influence: Dominant oil corporations frequently oppose change to protect their economic interests, creating challenges for activists to obtain tangible promises and hold these corporations responsible (Nwosu, 2023; Obi & Okonkwo, 2022).

Internal divisions: The absence of cohesion and varied objectives within youth movements might impede their efficacy and render them vulnerable to manipulation (Arowolo & Akpan, 2023).

Limited resources: Economic limitations and inadequate technological infrastructure might restrict the extent and effectiveness of youth engagement, particularly in rural areas (Mbalu & Takyi, 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To amplify their influence and attain enduring transformation, young movements should contemplate the following strategies:

Establishing partnerships: Engaging with non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and other social movements can enhance capabilities, magnify perspectives, and overcome resource constraints

Strategic diversification involves integrating internet activism, community organizing, legal challenges, and innovative advocacy to sustain progress and involve many.

Emphasize Economic Empowerment: Connecting environmental justice with economic opportunity for communities can expand support and establish lasting sustainability (Nwaogu, 2019).

Intergenerational Collaboration: Cooperation between younger and older generations can effectively facilitate the transfer of knowledge, expand a movement's support base, and enhance the overall influence of collective efforts

CONCLUSION

The study shows that youth involvement influences Rivers State, Nigeria's complex resource extraction problems. Historical grievances, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequality have inspired young people to strive for environmental justice, community empowerment, and sustainable development.

Focusing on MOSOP and the #StopTheGasFlare campaign gives a profound grasp of regional activism. Both movements emphasize nonviolent protests, community mobilization, and awareness. However, their techniques have changed with changing conditions and resources. Despite garnering global attention, MOSOP's confrontation with the government and oil firms was hampered by official censorship and internal divisions. However, #StopTheGasFlare uses social media to mobilize more people and influence stakeholders through digital action.

These groups nevertheless face challenges despite their progress in raising awareness, impacting policy discussions, and empowering communities. Government repression, commercial animosity, inadequate resources, and internal divisions persist. However, these movements' swift recovery and adaptability offer valuable lessons for future activism.

Rivers State youth groups should create strategic relationships with non-governmental organizations and international institutions to use resources and knowledge more efficiently. Organizations can diversify their methods and sustain engagement while extending their audience by combining online and offline activities. Environmental justice and economic growth must be linked for local communities to win support and make lasting change. Promoting intergenerational collaboration can also reduce knowledge gaps and boost their efforts.

This study shows that youth activism in resource extraction conflicts is multifaceted and diverse. Despite frustration and wrath, Young Rivers State residents have campaigned for their towns and environment. Understanding the history, tactics, and challenges of youth movements can help policymakers and stakeholders support them and create a more fair, impartial, and sustainable future for Rivers State and the Niger Delta.

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