

The Political Ecology of Oil Pipeline Vandalism in Nigeria

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Abstract: - This paper examines the effect of oil pipeline vandalism on the Nigerian economic, social and environmental space. It seeks to establish the implications of oil pipeline vandalism for Nigeria especially as it relates to dwindling fortunes for the livelihood of the people of Niger Delta and the national economy cum security. This paper utilized secondary (including historical) sources of data to show the threat of Oil Pipeline Vandalism as exemplified in loss of lives, economic losses, environmental degradation, and pipeline explosions. The paper submits that oil pipeline vandalism portends serious environmental crime with dire consequences for Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption, Militancy, National Security, Pipeline vandalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian economy is heavily dependent on the oil sector which, according to the International Monetary Fund accounts for over 95 percent of export earnings and about 83 percent of government revenues (EIA, 2011). The oil industry is primarily located in the Niger Delta where it has been a source of conflict as local groups seeking a share of the oil wealth often attack the oil infrastructure. Over the years, the Nigerian petroleum industry has been confronted by the challenge of oil pipeline vandalism. Oil Pipeline Vandalism also known in Nigeria as oil bunkering which refers to the willful or deliberate act of drilling into the pipelines with the intent to steal crude oil and associated petroleum products.

In Nigeria, petroleum and associated products are transported through extensive network of pipelines that run across different locations from remote to populated areas. Pipeline is one of the effective means of uninterrupted and steady supply of crude oil. This medium of transporting crude oil has existed for a long period of time across the globe due to its considered ability to help reduce accident, oil spill and environmental pollution. The increase in oil pipelines vandalism in Nigeria is traceable to the pervasive poverty in the Niger Delta, and Nigeria at large, as well as corruption and sabotage within the oil sector. Frightening unemployment among the youths, the international dimension whereby some nationals collude with foreigners to steal crude oil in the country for pecuniary gains and the establishment of illegal refineries in some parts of the Niger Delta also encourages pipeline vandalism.

II. THE NIGERIA OIL INFRASTRUCTURE

Crude Oil was first discovered at Araromi Sea-side (of present Ondo State) in 1908 by the German Bitumen Corporation and later at Oogoro (also in present day Ondo State) in 1952

before it was discovered in Oloibiri (of present Bayelsa State) in 1956 (Ebiseni, 2014, Falola, 1999). The discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria marked the birth of the petroleum industry. Since then, the economy of Nigeria has been dependent on petroleum in a very large scale. In addition to oil, Nigeria holds the largest natural gas reserves in Africa but has limited infrastructure in place to develop the sector. Natural gas that is associated with oil production is mostly flared but the development of regional pipelines, the expansion of liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure and policies to ban gas flaring are expected to accelerate growth in the sector, both for export and domestic use in electricity generation.

Although Oil did not assume its present significant position in the national economy until the 1970's, it has since become the mainstay of contemporary Nigeria economy. Since its commercialisation, Oil has impacted so much on the national economy both positively and negatively. On the negative side, the effects are largely seen with respect to the condition of the communities where oil wells have been exploited. Majority of these communities are yet to recover from environmental degradation which has led to deprivation of the people's means of livelihood as well as health challenges. Despite the proceeds from oil sales, rents, taxes and royalties paid by Transnational Oil Companies (TNOCs) which many has argued to be the positive effect of Oil on the national economy; the effects of oil on national growth and development is still questionable.

To aid the distribution of crude oil product from the oil rich Niger Delta to other parts of the country, a network of oil pipelines was constructed to inter-link some states at strategic locations (Onuorah, 2007). Nigeria has a total pipeline grid of 5001 kilometers.



Fig 1: A typical stretch of Oil Pipeline



Fig 2: A vandalized Pipeline

This consists of 4315 kilometers of multiproduct pipelines and 666 kilometers of crude oil pipelines. These pipelines transverse the country, forming a network that inter-connects the 22 petroleum storage depots, the four refineries at Port-Harcourt (I and II), Kaduna and Warri, the off-shore terminals at Bonny and, Escravos, and the Jetties at Alas Cove, Calabar, Okirika and Warri (Onuoha, 2007, p.6). This system of oil pipelines are used to transport crude oil to the refineries in Port-Harcourt (I and II), Warri and Kaduna, covering a total distance of 719 kilometres. The multi-product pipelines are used to transport products from the refineries/import receiving jetties to the 22 petroleum storage depots at various places in the country.

These length of pipelines crisscross thousands of kilometers from crude oil production centers to crude oil export facilities or refineries. The pipelines are often located close to farmlands and in some cases even crossing water bodies that serve as source(s) of water to some communities in Nigeria.

Fig 3: Nigeria Crude Oil Pipeline Map



Source: www.premiumtimesng.com (accessed on July 10, 2017)

Table 1: Nigerian Pipeline Grid and Distribution Network

1	System 2A	Warri-Benin-Ore-Mosimi
2	System 2AX	Auchi-Benin
3	System 2B	Atlas Cove-Mosimi-Ibadan-Ilorin Mosimi – Satellite (Ejigbo in Lagos) Mosimi – Ikeja
4	System 2C	Escravos-Warri-Kaduna (Crude Lines)
5	System 2D	Kaduna0Zaria-Kano-Zaria-Gusau Kaduna-Jos-Gombe-Maiduguri
6	System 2E	PH-Aba-Enugu-Makurdi
7	System 2EX	PH-Aba-Enugu-Makurdi-Yola
8	System 2CX	Enugu – Auchi (interconnection) Auchi – Suleja – Kaduna Suleja – Minna
9	System 2DX	Jos – Gombe

Source: Onuoha (2007, p. 6-7)

III. CAUSES OF OIL PIPELINE VANDALISM IN NIGERIA

Vandalism is an action involving deliberate destruction of public or private property. Within the public domain, vandalism denotes willful destruction of public or government property in keeping with criminal or political intent. Oil pipeline vandalism therefore implies deliberate breaking of oil pipelines with the intent to steal petroleum products or to sabotage the government (Vivan, 2012). In Nigeria, oil pipeline vandalism has been perpetrated principally by criminal syndicates who are motivated by the desire to loot oil products for material gains. Oil pipeline vandalism has also manifested in the act of drilling into the pipelines with the intent to steal products.

According to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the activities of pipeline vandals resulted in a colossal cost of over N174.57 billion in product losses and repairs of pipelines within the last 10 years. The environmental consequences of these include widespread ecosystem damage, loss of biodiversity and socio-economic problems. Indeed, the incidence of oil pipeline vandalism has been on the rise in Nigeria (NNPC, 2015). In similar vein, the 2013 annual report of the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative [NEITI] stated that “Nigeria lost a total of 10.9 billion US Dollars to oil theft between 2009 and 2011. This scaring losses confirms the dangers posed by oil pipeline vandalism to the national economy.

Most incidences of pipeline vandalism occur in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This is not to say that oil pipeline vandalism is limited to the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The delta of the Niger River is located on the bight of Bonny, off the Guinea Gulf on the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria. It occupies a land area of about 112,110 Square kilometers covering nine states viz: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. Incessant oil pipeline vandalism is daily taking a frightening proportion, as vandals are becoming more daring in their criminal activities. Also most

oil companies are being forced to shut down operations as a result of vandalisation of the pipelines.

The prevalence of oil pipeline vandalism in Nigeria has been principally driven by the culture of inordinate ambition to amass fortunes for accelerated socio-economic mobility and empowerment. This is a pattern of ‘primitive accumulation’ that is prevalent in Nigeria’s public and private domains. It is to be noted, however, that pipeline vandalism has also been occasioned by political sabotage (Okoli and Orinya, 2013).

According to NNPC (2015), from 2010-2014 a total of 20,965 cases of pipeline vandalism have occurred in Nigeria. For pipeline vandalism to be as rampant as shown by the figure above despite the existence of the **Petroleum Production and Distribution (Anti-Sabotage) Act of 1975** calls for serious concern. The **Petroleum Production and Distribution (Anti-Sabotage) Act of 1975** states that “any person who willfully does, aids, incites, counsels another with intent to obstruct or prevent the production/procurement/distribution of petroleum products in any part of Nigeria will be guilty of the offense of sabotage, and is liable to a death sentence or a term of imprisonment of up to 21 years.” Despite the existence of this legislation, oil pipeline vandalism occurs on a daily basis and the cause as shown by a plethora of existing literature (Ojakorotu, 2009, Sanusi, A et.al, 2016, Okoli and Orinya, 2013, Njoku, 2016e.t.c) are not issues that the Nigerian State cannot deal with appropriately.



Fig 4: Nigerians scooping oil from a vandalized oil pipeline



Fig 5: A vandalized oil pipeline

It has been indicated above that oil pipeline vandalism is principally motivated by the criminal intent of the vandals who break into pipelines to drill products for pecuniary gains. The criminal intent notwithstanding, there are other factors which tend to predispose people to indulge in oil pipeline vandalism. Prominent among these factors are pervasive poverty, corruption and sabotage, militancy, youth unemployment, corrosive pipelines and insecurity, as well as activities of illegal refineries.

- *Pervasive Poverty due to unfulfilled expectations/promises by oil producing companies and the Government*

The environmental degradation of the Niger Delta has deprived the people their economic mainstay that is, farming and fishing. This eco-system damage on water bodies, farmlands and the terrain without adequate and appropriate clean-ups has reduced the economic activities and access to clean water of the local communities. This has resulted in increased poverty among the coastal communities. Thus, some people occupying the communities where oil pipelines traversed engage in the busting of oil pipelines in order to scoop oil for sale for the purpose of economic survival. Yusuf (2015) stated that “at the centre of the crisis of pipeline vandalism is the issue of poverty”. He buttressed this statement by making reference to the statement of one of the Niger Delta activists, Chief Efe Maxwell who reportedly stated that:

Suffering and poverty is just too much for people. I can tell you that those of us living in the Niger Delta region feel short changed even by the so-called oil companies which have not done enough in terms of corporate social responsibility. So, this has caused a lot of people to go into pipeline vandalism.

Also, the high expectations that oil producing companies and the Government would develop the Niger Delta by providing social amenities such as electricity, healthcare, road networks, youth empowerment programs, employment, and overall community development has been defeated to a large extent. There is therefore little or no government presence in the Niger delta region thus accentuating poverty in the region.

- *Corrupt leadership and Sabotage in the Oil Sector*

Corruption is endemic in every facet of the Nigerian society. It is on record that the Oil Sector has been used by successive regimes as “Special rewards” to affiliates of political elites as shown by the ownership of more oil blocs by Northerners (Daily Trust, 2016). It is also widely believed that some unscrupulous elements within the oil industry aid pipelines vandalism and oil theft. For instance, Asu (2016) reported that “some people within NNPC would collude with the vandals whom they alerted whenever products were being pumped into the pipelines”. Arguing that the act of sabotage in the oil sector is partly the reason why pipeline vandals had persistently busted pipelines within the Lagos axis, that is, at

the Atlas Cove, the country's major discharging points for petroleum products through pipelines; Asu (2016) also ascribe the same phenomenon to the situation in Arepo in Ogun State which he described as "the major hot bed of pipeline vandalism and fuel theft." Thus, corruption and sabotage within the oil sector heightens pipeline vandalism.

- *Activities of Militant Groups*

Niger Delta agitation for a fairer distribution of oil revenues is not new. As far back as February 1966, a former police officer named Jasper Adaka Boro led a rebellion on behalf of the Niger Delta. Boro recruited 40 men into an organization known as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force. Boro gave his men training in the use of firearms and explosives in the creeks and bushes. On February 23, 1966, the men attacked a police station at Yenagoa, raided the armoury and kidnapped some officers. They blew up pipelines, engaged the police in a gunfight and declared the Niger Delta an independent republic. The revolt was however suppressed and Boro and his men were sentenced to death.

In the 1990s, Ken Saro-Wiwa attempted a more peaceful agitation for compensation for environmental damage caused by oil drilling and a greater slice of oil revenues but Saro-Wiwa and his clique were assassinated by the State on trumped up civil disturbances. According to Adeyemo and Olu-Adeyemi (2009):

Pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta is traceable to the evolution of militant struggle for resource control in the region.... various political movements and activists have emerged in opposition to the perceived injustices perpetrated upon the people of the Niger Delta by the government and the oil companies. These were usually non-violentin Saro Wiwa's footsteps came others who, having seen the government's reaction to non-violent activism advocated violence as resistance to what they regarded as the enslavement of their people"

Ebiri and Onakemu (2016) reported a Niger Delta activist as follows "all the Niger Delta people have ever wanted is to have the right to access our God-given resources to develop at our own pace, live in our clean and serene riverine and mangrove environment." Thus, militant activities since 1999 were essentially political actions directly against the Nigerian state and multi-national oil companies aimed at creating greater awareness about the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region (Njoku, 2016). The resurgence of militant activities in the Niger delta region by the *Niger Delta Avengers* for instance has recorded several pipelines vandalism. Abia (2016) reported that "the activities of the Niger Delta Avengers have reduced the country's oil production by 800,000 barrels per day, a sad situation in an era of bad economy". Onyibe and Ejim (2016) specifically stated that "Shell and Chevron have lost over 50 percent of their productions as a result of the continual bombing of their oil facilities by the militants".

- *Youth Unemployment*

Many of Nigeria's educated youths are unemployed. The National Bureau of statistics has stated that unemployment rate rose from 13.9 per cent in the third quarter of 2016 to 14.2 per cent in the last quarter (NBS, 2017). Thus, in the light of the prevailing economic challenges facing Nigeria coupled with the 'get-rich-quick' syndrome, pipeline vandalism, oil theft and oil bunkering could naturally become a means for economic survival.

- *Corrosive Pipelines and Insecurity*

Nigeria has over 6000 kilometres of flow lines and pipelines. Yet, the difficult terrain, inadequate personnel and logistics has made policing the long stretch of the pipelines and other oil facilities herculean. Also, many of the pipelines used in the transportation networks are fatigued due to age and exposure to harsh weather conditions over time. This has made these pipelines easily vulnerable to punctures, breaks and exposure for vandals with the sole purpose of wrecking economic havoc and stealing of petroleum products.

- *Activities of Illegal Refineries*

Illegal refineries exists in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta area. The illegal refineries otherwise known as "bush" or "artisanal" refineries is a major factor that has encouraged oil pipeline vandalism. The Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps has claimed that between 2015 and 2016, it identified and destroyed 250 illegal refineries and secured the conviction of 40 perpetrators out of the 118 arrests made in the Niger Delta region (Premium Times, 2016).



Fig 6 & 7: Illegal Refineries destroyed by Security Forces in the Niger Delta

Although the ‘illegal’ refineries are a testimony to the ingenuity of the Nigerian and his creative ability to innovate, despite the challenges of his socio-economic environment; one is at a dilemma whether to condemn this ‘creativity’. Of course, in the advanced societies where human resources are prized and innovation is applauded, such ingenuity as has been exhibited by operators of the so called illegal refineries would rather than being criminalised, constitute the foundation of technological breakthrough.

- *International Dimension of Pipeline Vandalism in Nigeria*

Njoku (2016) established that “there is certainly the international dimension of pipeline vandalism and oil theft in the Niger Delta region, the hub of Nigeria’s oil industry. This has resulted in the emergence of illegal oil bunkering as an economic activity. Consequently, this has given rise to a complicated network involving the activities of pipeline vandals, oil thieves and illegal oil bunkerers in the Niger Delta. Many vandals engage in pipeline vandalisation and oil theft for the purpose of scooping crude oil for sale to oil syndicates on international market”.

IV. THE EFFECTS OF OIL PIPELINE VANDALISM

In Nigeria, the effects of pipeline vandalism is multi-faceted. Chief among the effects include huge economic losses from pipeline & plant shutdown, environmental degradation, fire outbreaks usually resulting in loss of lives, displacement of communities and the disruption of the ecosystem. Other manifestations are the scarcity of petroleum products as well as decrease in gas supply for electricity generation.

- *Economic Loss*

Pipeline vandalism and oil theft have resulted in increasing loss of national revenue. The economic losses are viewed in terms of the monetary value of lost products, plant shutdown and the cost of pipeline repairs. In February, 2016 the NNPC was reported to have incurred N24.23 billion operational deficit, while in March 2016, the report indicated that it has declared N18.89 billion loss. The financial losses by NNPC was reported to be due to “a major slump in export sales due largely to shut-in of about 300,000 barrels of crude oil at Forcados Terminal following *force majeure* declared by Shell in February 15, 2016”. Eboh (2016) was emphatic that Nigeria reportedly “lost N12.566 billion in one month, that is, March 2016, due to petroleum products theft and vandalisation of the facilities of the NNPC”.

- *Environmental Degradation*

Pipeline vandalism has led to high incidence of oil spillage which has in turn resulted in environmental pollution and ecosystem disruption in Nigeria over the years. Oil spills are harmful to living organisms, vegetation and water bodies with its chemical composites which are poisonous to groundwater and soils. These deposits on land surface can impede growth of crops and severe bush burning if ignited.

The Amnesty International (2011) estimated that “oil spill accounts for as many as 546 million gallons of oil into the Niger Delta environment over the last five decades, equivalent of about 11 million gallons annually.”

Also, the full assessment report of UNEP (2011) on environmental injustices in Ogoniland and the Niger Delta revealed the following:

- ✓ Serious contamination of land and underground water tends to be localized; air pollution related to oil industry operations is pervasive and affects the quality of life of about one million people.
- ✓ Contamination of drinking water with concentrations of benzene, carcinogen and other multiplicity of pollutants at level over 900 times above World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.
- ✓ Contamination of soil over five meters deep in many area studies.
- ✓ Spill sites oil companies claimed to have cleaned up were still highly contaminated by pollutants.
- ✓ Oil companies failed to meet minimum Nigerian standards, let alone international oil industry standards.
- ✓ Water coated with hydrocarbon was more than 1,000 times the level allowed by Nigerian drinking water standards.
- ✓ Evidence of oil companies dumping contaminated soil in unlined pits.
- ✓ The impact of oil spills on mangrove vegetation is disastrous.



- *Fire Disasters/Pipeline Explosions*

This has been the worst manifestation of the effect of oil pipeline vandalism in Nigeria. Over 2,000 lives have been lost to explosion from damaged pipelines in the last 15 years. The pipeline explosion in Jesse in 1988 that claimed over 1,000 lives and that of Atlas Cove in Lagos where 500 people were lost are vivid examples of this menace. Sometimes, the exact figures of casualties were not given in the event of fire outbreaks while some incidents were not reported. When these vandalism attacks occur, vulnerable citizens nearby, innocent communities and clans close to these facilities feel the impact in terms of fire outbreaks, if these petroleum products are ignited. These explosions sometimes occur for days razing villages, leaving victims, orphans and loss of properties in its wake. Apart from human casualties, oil pipeline disasters have resulted in loss of source(s) of livelihood, population displacement, and destruction of family assets as well as environmental degradation.

Timeline of Oil Pipeline Disasters in Nigeria

October 18, 1998: At Jesse in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, a petroleum pipeline exploded killing well over 1000 villagers, some of whom were scavenging gasoline.

April 22, 1999: At Bayatta, Delta State, a ruptured pipeline exploded killing over 50 and destroying farmlands and streams.

January 14, 2000: Unknown numbers of villagers killed at Gatta, Delta State due to pipeline explosion. It also damaged farm lands and destroyed flora and fauna.

March 14, 2000: At least 60 people lost their lives to pipeline explosion in Lagos coupled with environmental pollution

July 10, 2000: Another pipeline explosion near the town of Jesse killed about 250 villagers.

July 16, 2000: At least 100 villagers died when a ruptured pipeline exploded in Warri.

November 30, 2000: A leaking pipeline caught fire near the fishing village of Ebute near Lagos, killing at least 60 people.

June 19, 2003: A pipeline punctured by vandals exploded and killed at least 125 villagers near Umuahia, Abia State.

January 6, 2004: Over 200 hectares of farmland and properties worth millions of Naira destroyed at Elikpolewedu Community of Rivers State.

September 17, 2004: A pipeline punctured by thieves exploded and killed dozens of people in Lagos State.

December 2004: At least 500 people lost their lives to pipeline explosion in Imore Village of Lagos coupled with environmental pollution

May 30, 2005: 34 persons were injured and 15 died after 11 days due to fire outbreak from a vandalized pipeline at Akinfo in Oyo State.

January 13, 2006: Over 150 died and there was pollution of water as well as the incineration of everything within a 20 metre radius due to exploded vandalized pipeline at Ilado village in Lagos state.

May 12, 2006: An oil pipeline punctured by thieves exploded and killed 200 people at the Atlas Creek Island in Lagos State.

December 26, 2006: A vandalised oil pipeline exploded in Abule Egba, Lagos. Up to 500 people may have been killed.

December 25, 2007: Many people were wounded and over 50 lost their lives to pipeline explosion in Lagos.

May 16, 2008: The 2008 Ijegan pipeline explosion where many people and buildings were burnt.

May 2010: Vandalised oil pipeline at Amukpe, near Sapele in Delta State destroyed many lives and properties.

May 2011: Population displacement and family dislocation in Okoroma Clan, Nembe LGA of Bayelsa State.

October 1, 2012: Loss of lives and destruction of farmlands in Umeeke-Umeze in Ososio LGA of Abia State.

January 22, 2016: Vandalism at the Akulagba pipeline in Warri South - West Local Government Area of Delta State.

July 29, 2016: The Fire explosion at Arepo and other coastal communities Pipeline in Ogun State.

February 21, 2017: Many people died from gas explosion in farmlands at Ewekwu community of Rivers State.

Source: Author

- *Loss of Foreign Direct Investment*

Pipeline vandalism and oil theft have contributed to the current policy actions of some trans-national oil companies with regard to divestment of their investments in Nigeria. For instance, it was reported that in 2014, Shell concluded plans to sell four of its oil fields in Nigeria. According to *Financial Times* cited in Salau (2014), Shell had concluded in June 2013 to announce “a strategic review of its operations in Eastern Niger Delta, which could result in the divestment of its interests there”. Shell was further reported “to have been moving away from Nigerian onshore oil, which is plagued by industrial scale oil theft, security problems and oil spills.” The divestment of investments by some trans-national oil companies operating in Nigeria has serious implications for the country. In the first place, it leads to scale down of production activities in the oil sector of Nigeria’s economy, and thus reducing the revenue accruing to the coffers of the government. Secondly, it results in capital flight with its attendant problems in macro- economic activities. Thirdly, it gives rise to massive loss of jobs by Nigerians in the oil industry, thus depriving them of their sustainable means of livelihood. Yusuf (2016) has reported that Shell and Chevron’s total job cuts have risen to 23, 500 in Nigeria and other countries of operations by the two international oil companies.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This narration has discussed the critical issue of oil pipelines vandalism as well as its causes and its effects on the national economy. It was unequivocal that oil pipeline vandalism is principally motivated by the criminal intentions alongside other considerations like poverty, corruption and sabotage, infrastructural fatigue, international conspiracy as well as ineffective security surveillance around oil pipelines. The socio-economic effects of pipeline vandalism on Nigerian society which include the loss of oil revenue and critical infrastructure, environmental degradation and loss of lives as well as general insecurity were pointed out. It also showed that oil pipeline vandalism is an affront on the Nigerian laws just as it poses ample threat to Nigeria's economic aspirations and national security. It is highly recommended that the Nigerian security apparatus and legal system must evolve more strident strategies and penalties for perpetrators of oil pipeline vandalism in order to ensure deterrence. Also, the oil companies must interface more with the host communities for effective pipeline monitoring and policing.

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