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Multinational Companies and Environmental Degradation in Akwa Ibom State

Edet Joshua Tom[1] | Verra Ofonasaha John[2]

[1]Department of Political Science and Public Administration University of Uyo, Uyo, AkwaIbom State, Nigeria
[2]Department of Political Science and Public Administration University of Uyo, Uyo, AkwaIbom State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

This study investigate the environmental challenges caused by Multinational oil operations in Akwa Ibom State, highlighting the detrimental effects on crop yields, public health, land productivity, and farm income in the host communities. The research focused on oil producing areas of Mkpanak, Atabrikang, and Iwo Ukpum in Ibeno Local Government Area, where oil spills have significantly impacted the environment. The study identified multiple causes of these oil spills, including equipment failure, sabotage, human error, corrosion, blowouts, engineering mistakes, natural causes, and third-party interference, among others. These factors have resulted in widespread environmental degradation, including soil contamination, water pollution, and the destruction of local ecosystems. Despite numerous efforts by both federal and state governments to address the environmental damage in the Niger Delta, the region continues to face severe environmental issues. The work adopted descriptive method to gather information which made it to rely on documentary evidence. The work proposed that to reduced environmental degradation in oil producing areas of Akwa Ibom State government must be resilient in enforcement of extant environmental laws. To mitigate these challenges, the study recommended that the government enforce compliance with the "pay-as-you-flare" laws, directing the funds generated towards projects that would help alleviate the negative impacts of gas flaring in the host communities.

Keywords: Multinational Company, Oil Exploration, Environmental Degradation, Oil Spillage

Introduction:

Crude oil exploration and production in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, have contributed significantly to the nation's economy, but the consequences for local communities have been overwhelmingly negative. Despite its crucial role in the Nigerian economy, particularly in oil revenue generation, Akwa Ibom has suffered from severe environmental degradation due to the operations of multinational oil companies such as ExxonMobil. The state has witnessed the contamination of water bodies, destruction of biodiversity, soil contamination, and air pollution, which have undermined the livelihoods of the local population (Ezeanyika, 2006; Okonta & Douglas, 2001).

The oil-bearing communities in Akwa Ibom, once reliant on the region's fertile ecosystems for

farming and fishing, have seen their natural resources devastated by these oil operations. Streams, rivers, and lakes, which were once essential for local sustenance, have been polluted, rendering them unfit for agricultural or domestic use (Aboribo, 2018). Water pollution, soil erosion, and habitat destruction have not only decimated biodiversity but also hindered the region's agricultural productivity, thus deepening poverty among rural communities. The widespread environmental damage has led to the contamination of drinking water, loss of arable land, and destruction of marine habitats, which were crucial to local fishing activities (Ijibunu, 2015).

The environmental challenges in Akwa Ibom have further worsened due to the ineffective enforcement of environmental regulations. Despite the existence of policies designed to mitigate the negative impacts of oil exploration, enforcement remains woefully inadequate. The multinational oil companies operating in the region continue to flare gas, discharge toxic wastes, and cause oil spills without facing significant consequences (Olujimi, 2010). This lack of accountability for environmental violations exacerbates the damage, leading to long-term ecological and socio-economic problems for the people of Akwa Ibom. As noted by Aboribo (2018), environmental degradation, coupled with an absence of robust socioeconomic infrastructure, has perpetuated cycles of poverty and social unrest in the region.

While Akwa Ibom contributes a substantial portion of Nigeria's revenue through oil, the state remains an example of development failure, plagued by insufficient infrastructure, widespread poverty, and environmental ruin (Ijibunu, 2015). Oil spills and gas flaring have polluted vital ecosystems, including farmland and fishing waters, destroying the resources on which local communities depend for their livelihoods. The chemical composition of oil spills has left soil infertile, destroyed aquatic life, and severely impacted agriculture. According to Akpan and Ekanem (2019), fish stocks have dwindled due to oxygen-depleting bacteria that thrive on spilled oil, further disrupting the ecosystem and leading to a decline in biodiversity.

The challenges of enforcing environmental protection standards in Nigeria's petroleum industry are multifaceted. Regulatory bodies such as the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) face significant challenges, including inadequate resources, poor logistical support, and bureaucratic inefficiencies that prevent them from adequately enforcing environmental policies (Akinola, 2017). Moreover, local communities have little involvement in the formulation or execution of these policies, resulting in a lack of community buy-in and poor compliance with environmental regulations (Olujimi, 2010). The absence of effective enforcement, coupled with limited awareness of environmental risks, further exacerbates the region's ecological crisis.

Review of Conceptual and Operational Literature:

Concept of Multinational Company:

The concept of a multinational company has been defined in various ways. Hill (2005) describes a multinational company as a business entity with production plants and operations across several countries, with its headquarters in the country of origin. Echoing Hill's view, Osuagwu, Onyebuchi, and Eze (2013) describe multinational corporations as large-scale organizations with a global presence. Similarly, Eluka, Ndubuisi-Okolo, and Anekwe (2016) characterize multinational corporations as firms capable of managing, coordinating, and directing economic activities across multiple nations. According to Spero and Hart (2003), a Multinational Corporation (MNC) is a business entity that maintains direct investment abroad and holds value-added investments in more than one country, transferring assets, expertise, technology, and marketing capabilities to enable production in foreign markets. Kogut and Zander (2003), as cited in Olanrewaju (2014), describe MNCs as successful businesses that expand from their home

country to operate internationally. The International Labour Organization (ILO) similarly defines multinational corporations as economic enterprises headquartered in their home country with facilities and operations in numerous other countries. Interestingly, the United Nations has aligned with this interpretation.

Norberg (2003), Hashimu and Ango, (2012), takes a critical stance, suggesting that MNCs often act as agents of neo-imperialism, continuing exploitative practices, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. The primary goal of multinational companies often centers on minimizing production costs through access to raw materials, markets, and inexpensive labor. This aligns with Marxist theories, which argue that multinational corporations are instruments of capitalism and exploitation (Osuagwu and Ezie, 2013). For instance, throughout the Niger Delta, local communities experience extreme poverty and lack proper infrastructure, revealing a long-standing imbalance in the relationship between multinational oil corporations and the host communities. In Akwa Ibom State, the activities of multinational oil companies have inflicted lasting damage on both the local population and the environment. The negative impacts of these oil MNCs are evident in environmental pollution, health hazards such as skin disorders, respiratory issues, reproductive health problems, and diseases borne from air and water contamination (Ebong, 2018).

Environment Degradation:

Environmental degradation has emerged as a significant global concern, drawing attention from scholars, policymakers, and citizens. It refers to the deterioration of natural resources, including air, water, and soil, alongside the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity (Ebong, 2018). Human activities such as industrialization, agriculture, urbanization, and unsustainable resource extraction contribute to environmental degradation, often with irreversible consequences that threaten ecosystems and human societies.

In Nigeria, the Niger Delta region exemplifies severe environmental degradation due to extensive oil exploration, gas flaring, and frequent oil spills. These activities have devastated ecosystems, undermining traditional livelihoods such as agriculture, fisheries, and forestry (Etebu & Azubuike, 2021). Oil spills, commonly resulting from pipeline ruptures and operational negligence, contaminate water sources, making them unsafe for drinking, fishing, and irrigation (Akinola, 2017). Additionally, soil contamination from crude oil damages agricultural productivity, while gas flaring releases harmful pollutants like sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide, exacerbating respiratory illnesses among residents (Ugbomeh, 2018).

Beyond ecological damage, environmental degradation in the Niger Delta presents significant socio-economic and human rights concerns. The loss of water quality and contamination of marine life have heightened food insecurity and increased outbreaks of waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid fever (Olawuyi, 2020; Ugbomeh, 2018). Economic hardships are further intensified by weak environmental policies and ineffective enforcement, allowing multinational oil companies to operate with minimal accountability (Ite, 2022). In Akwa Ibom State and the broader Niger Delta, corporations such as Shell, Chevron, and ExxonMobil have been criticized for pollution with little remediation (Nwachukwu & Uduma, 2022). The depletion of biodiversity and destruction of ecosystems force local communities into cycles of poverty and displacement. Despite longstanding demands for improved environmental management and corporate accountability, progress remains slow, leaving communities vulnerable to continued environmental harm (Akinola, 2017).

Research Methodology:

The study adopted qualitative and descriptive research designs to examine the impact of multinational oil companies on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, with a focus on Akwa Ibom State. It relied primarily on secondary data from scholarly journals, textbooks, newspapers, government reports, and publications from institutions like the National Bureau of

Statistics. These sources provided diverse perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

A qualitative approach was used for data analysis, with content analysis as the primary method. This technique allowed for a systematic examination of textual materials, helping to identify patterns and key issues related to environmental and socio-economic impacts. The study specifically analyzed how multinational oil companies, such as ExxonMobil, have affected the region's environment and local livelihoods. By synthesizing insights from various sources, the research aimed to highlight the complexities of environmental degradation and the challenges of enforcing effective policies in the Niger Delta.

Review of Empirical Literature:

Akinwale (2022), in a study titled Multinational Corporations' Oil Exploration, Poverty, and Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, aimed to examine the link between oil exploration activities and environmental and economic impacts in the region. Using primary data collected through surveys and interviews with affected communities and secondary data from governmental and NGO reports, the study employed descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to reveal that oil spills and gas flaring have severely destroyed farmlands and water sources, exacerbating poverty and hindering development. The study concluded that multinational corporations have failed to adhere to environmental standards, and it recommended stricter enforcement of environmental laws and the initiation of community-driven development projects to mitigate the adverse impacts of oil exploration.

Similarly, Nwankwo and Emeka (2023), in their work titled "Survey of Wastewater Issues Due to Oil Spills and Pollution in the Niger Delta", focused on analyzing the challenges posed by oil spills on water quality in the region. Data were collected through field surveys and water quality testing, while quantitative analysis was used to assess the levels of pollution. The study revealed alarmingly high concentrations of chemical pollutants in water bodies, rendering them unsafe for human consumption and agricultural use. The researchers concluded that the contamination caused by oil spills is a major threat to environmental and human health in the Niger Delta and recommended establishing a robust oil spill response framework and investing in water purification technologies to address these challenges.

Another significant study by Okeke and Adewale (2022), titled "Environmental Racism in Nigeria's Niger Delta: An Ethical Appraisal", evaluated the ethical implications of environmental degradation caused by multinational corporations. Using a qualitative approach, the study relied on interviews with stakeholders such as community leaders, environmental activists, and oil company representatives. Through content analysis, the researchers identified patterns of environmental racism, where corporate negligence disproportionately affects the most vulnerable communities. The study concluded that environmental degradation in the Niger Delta represents an ecological and ethical crisis driven by weak governance and corporate irresponsibility. It recommended policy reforms that enforce corporate accountability and prioritize environmental justice for impacted communities.

In a related study, Bassey and Udo (2023) investigated the conflicts arising from oil exploration activities in their work titled Impacts of Oil Exploration: Oil and Gas Conflicts; Niger Delta as a Case Study. The study utilized focus group discussions with community members and key informant interviews with local leaders and oil industry stakeholders. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that pipeline vandalism, crude oil theft, and sabotage exacerbate environmental damage while escalating conflicts between communities and corporations. The study concluded that oil exploration activities have deepened tensions in the region and recommended the development of conflict resolution mechanisms that involve all stakeholders, alongside enhanced security measures for oil infrastructure.

Eze and Amadi (2022), in their study titled Human Security, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Development: The Case of Oil Exploration in Nigeria's Niger Delta, explored the impacts of oil exploration on human security and sustainable livelihoods. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study combined household surveys with in-depth interviews and analyzed the data statistically and thematically. The findings revealed that oil exploration has led to the loss of arable land, food insecurity, and displacement of local communities, significantly undermining sustainable development. The study concluded that the socio-economic fabric of the Niger Delta has been disrupted by multinational oil companies and recommended land rehabilitation, investment in alternative livelihoods, and the implementation of stricter environmental regulations to address these challenges.

Ita, Ebong, and Washington (2018) examined the enforcement challenges surrounding environmental protection policies in Nigeria's Niger Delta, with a specific focus on oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State. Their study highlights that ongoing oil exploration in the region has caused extensive environmental damage, including widespread contamination of agricultural land, deforestation, air pollution, contributions to global warming, and health issues, as well as social unrest stemming from unpaid compensation to affected communities. Employing a descriptive approach, the study utilized data from secondary sources, analyzed through the lens of relative deprivation theory. Findings indicate that, despite well-formulated environmental policies aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of oil exploration, these policies have had limited effect due to weak enforcement, insufficient constitutional provisions for environmental protection, conflicting management strategies, lack of mandatory environmental information disclosure, and an absence of political will from the Nigerian government. The authors recommended enhanced monitoring of multinational oil firms' activities and strengthening the enforcement of environmental policies to reduce environmental degradation in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta.

Onuoha, Ebong, and Ufomba (2018) conducted a study on "The Impact of Oil Exploration and Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Study of Oil-Producing Communities in Akwa Ibom." This study aimed to explore the environmental consequences of crude oil exploration, specifically focusing on its effects on six oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State. The study was prompted by the significant harm oil exploration has inflicted on agriculture, with substantial declines in activities like farming, fishing, and hunting, which were historically the primary sources of income and sustenance for local residents. Due to soil infertility, health risks, and regional underdevelopment, many community members have been compelled to abandon their traditional livelihoods and search for alternative means of survival. Data for the study were collected from secondary sources, and analysis revealed a significant link between oil exploration and environmental degradation in Akwa Ibom State, underscoring the need for more sustainable management of natural resources in the Niger Delta.

Ntorue (2018) studied the "Challenges of Development in the Niger Delta Region" using survey and descriptive methods. The research found that the underdevelopment of oil-producing communities is a direct result of oil exploration and environmental degradation. Although oil companies claim to support regional development, the study observed that many projects are poorly aligned with the genuine needs of host communities. The study recommended that oil companies in the Niger Delta re-evaluate their community development policies, focusing on technology transfer, employment, corporate social responsibility, and compensation to genuinely contribute to the region's socio-economic growth.

Theoretical Framework:

The Resource Curse Theory, also known as the Paradox of Plenty, provides the theoretical foundation for this study. Richard Auty (1993)

proposed that countries rich in natural resources often experience slower economic growth, weaker institutions, and increased conflict compared to less resource-endowed nations. This paradox results from economic mismanagement, rent-seeking behaviors, and governance failures that hinder sustainable development. A notable example is Nigeria's Niger Delta region, where oil wealth has not translated into economic progress but has instead led to poverty, environmental destruction, and social unrest.

The Niger Delta contributes significantly to Nigeria's GDP, with oil revenue accounting for over 90% of export earnings (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013). However, the region remains underdeveloped, with high poverty rates and inadequate infrastructure. Over-reliance on oil revenue has discouraged economic diversification, as seen during the 2014–2016 oil price crash, which plunged Nigeria into recession (Ross, 2001). Governance issues have further entrenched the resource curse, as corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues have hindered investments in public services, leaving the region with poor human development indicators (Watts, 2004). Despite oil revenue allocations through the derivation principle, the Niger Delta continues to suffer from inequality and a lack of basic amenities, reflecting the failure to translate resource wealth into development.

Environmental degradation is another major consequence of oil exploration in the Niger Delta. Frequent oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation have devastated local ecosystems, destroying livelihoods dependent on fishing and farming. This has fueled grievances, leading to militancy and unrest. Groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have demanded resource control and environmental compensation, supporting the theory's argument that resource wealth can trigger socio-political instability (Ross, 2001). Various initiatives, such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the derivation principle, have attempted to address these challenges but have largely failed due to corruption and inefficiency. As Watts (2004) observed, mismanagement of oil wealth has perpetuated cycles of poverty and conflict, deepening the resource curse. Addressing this issue requires strengthening governance through transparency and accountability, implementing the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA), and adhering to global standards such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Economic diversification into agriculture, manufacturing, and technology is crucial to reducing dependence on oil revenues. Environmental remediation efforts, such as the UNEP-led Ogoniland clean-up, must be prioritized to restore ecosystems and improve livelihoods. Additionally, empowering local communities through participatory development and equitable revenue-sharing mechanisms can help address grievances and foster stability. The Niger Delta exemplifies the Resource Curse Theory, demonstrating how resource wealth, when mismanaged, leads to economic stagnation, environmental degradation, and socio-political unrest. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms that prioritize sustainable development, environmental protection, and inclusive governance. Through these measures, Nigeria can harness its oil wealth for broader economic growth and regional stability.

Multinational oil companies (MNCs) and environmental degradation in Nigeria:

Multinational oil companies (MNCs) in Nigeria's Niger Delta significantly contribute to environmental degradation, with severe consequences for the region's ecosystem, economy, and public health. Their activities, including oil spills, gas flaring, and poor waste management, have devastated farmlands, contaminated water sources, and diminished biodiversity, threatening local livelihoods. Oil spills remain a major concern, as pipeline leaks, operational negligence, and sabotage lead to widespread pollution, undermining agriculture and fishing. Poor infrastructure maintenance and slow responses to spills exacerbate the damage, resulting in declining fish stocks, food insecurity, and economic hardship (Ejibunu & Odukoya,

2022; Kpone-Tonwe & Otu, 2021). Gas flaring, despite legal bans, persists due to cost-cutting measures by MNCs. The toxic emissions contribute to climate change, respiratory illnesses, acid rain, and crop destruction, further weakening agricultural productivity (Oguntoke & Anifowose, 2023).

Water pollution has severely impacted aquatic biodiversity, with hydrocarbons and heavy metals destroying fish populations and disrupting ecological balance (Etim et al., 2023). This has led to the marginalization of traditional livelihoods and widened socio-economic disparities. Communities experience health crises, poverty, and exclusion from oil wealth, fueling protests and conflicts against MNCs (Akpan & Umoh, 2022). Weak regulatory enforcement has allowed these environmental violations to persist. The Nigerian government's inadequate oversight and lack of strict penalties enable MNCs to continue harmful practices largely unchecked (Ikpe & Williams, 2023). While some firms implement Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, these efforts are often superficial. Sustainable solutions require inclusive CSR initiatives and stronger environmental policies to ensure accountability and long-term restoration (Adebayo & Tunde, 2021).

Crude Oil Spillage and it Effect on agricultural production in Akwa Ibom State:

The environmental consequences of oil exploration in the Niger Delta are well-documented, with adverse impacts such as soil erosion, water contamination, oil spills, and climate-related effects cited widely. For instance, Nwilo and Badejo (2015) highlighted chronic under-reporting of oil spills but estimated that approximately 115,000 barrels of oil pollute the delta annually, rendering it one of the most affected ecosystems globally. The UNDP Report (2016) also underscored that environmental degradation has become a primary concern for Niger Delta communities due to its detrimental effects on productivity, especially in fishing, farming, and the timber industries that form the economic backbone of the region.

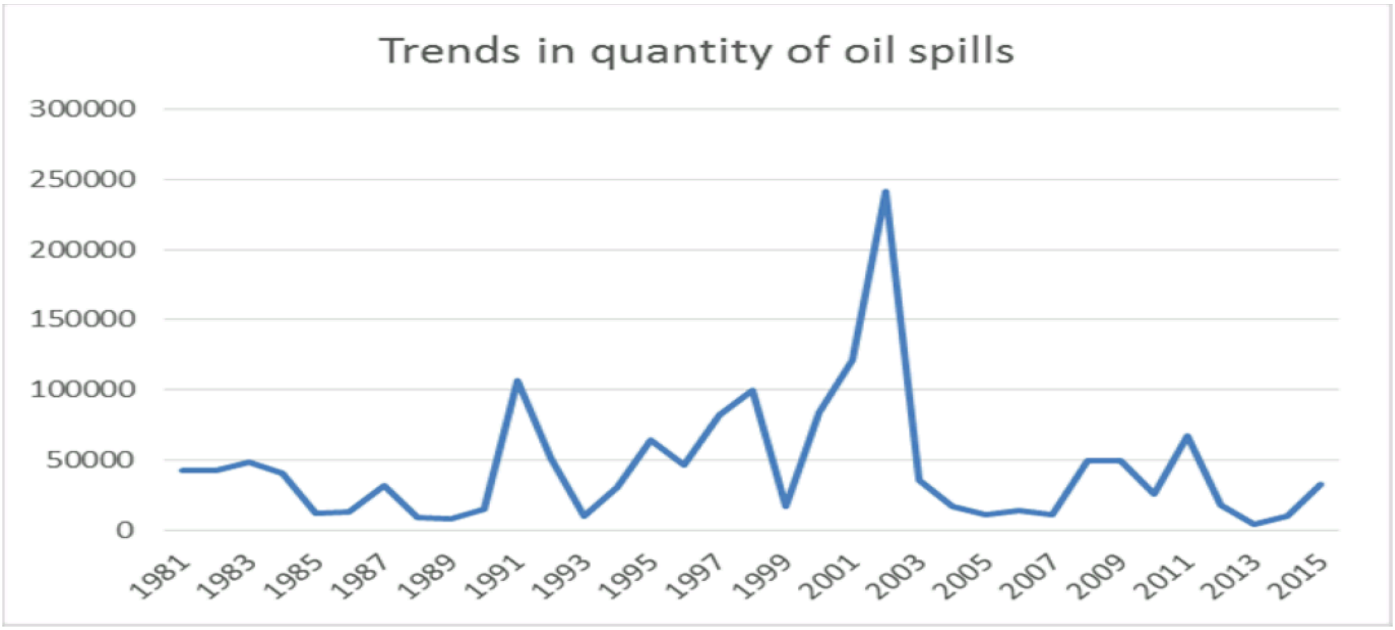
Similarly, Ekongson (2016) identified widespread ecological disruptions, including flooding and pollution, as primary barriers to sustainable development. The impacts of multinational oil companies in rural areas of Akwa Ibom have also been profound; Ebong (2018) described how companies like ExxonMobil have driven rural-urban migration, creating cycles of poverty, unemployment, and agricultural stagnation. According to Ezeanyika (2016), extensive pollution from oil activities has severely degraded local lands and marine environments, displacing traditional fishing activities, which sustain over 70% of the local population. Egwu (2012) concurred, emphasizing that oil exploitation has eroded the primary livelihoods of many, with detrimental effects on community health and welfare. Okpukri and Ibaba (2014) added that the environmental damage caused by oil production has significantly impacted agricultural and fishing activities, while Bisina (2014) observed that agriculture, once the dominant livelihood, has declined markedly since commercial oil exploration began in 1958. He attributed this downturn to the environmental neglect exhibited by oil firms, which has transformed productive land into infertile wastelands. Nwilo (2015) provided further insights, estimating that a significant proportion of oil spills stem from corrosion, operational failures, and sabotage, all of which contribute to widespread environmental degradation.

Anioke (2015) echoed these concerns, describing how oil industry infrastructure has permanently altered sensitive areas of the delta, with construction and frequent oil spills drastically affecting farmland and aquatic ecosystems. This environmental degradation has compelled many farmers to abandon their lands, exacerbating poverty. Ugbomeh (2018) asserted that the Niger Delta requires heightened environmental protections due to the severe impacts of oil activities on water quality, fisheries, and overall ecosystem health, which have undermined food security and local biodiversity. Building on these perspectives, Sampson (2015) reported that Shell

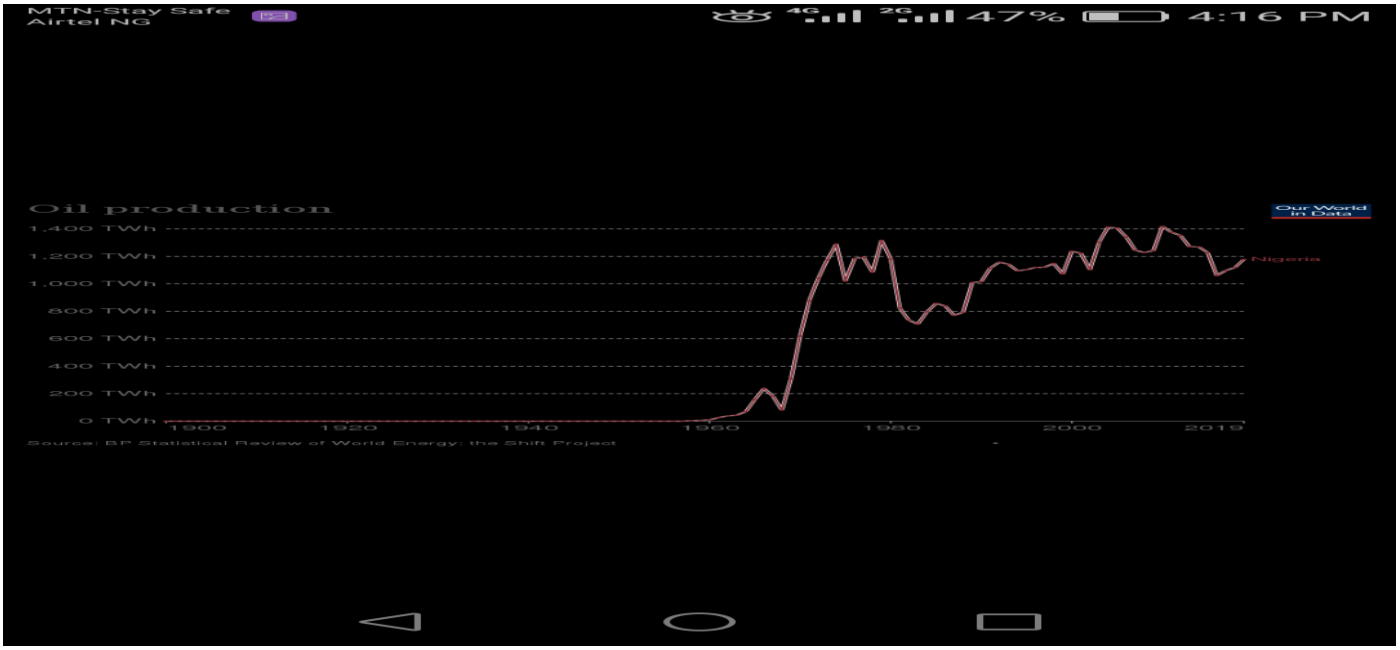
Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) recorded over 3,000 oil spill incidents in the region between 2000 and 2018, yet local communities continue to face development and employment deficits despite suffering substantial environmental and economic losses. According to Ekpebu and Ukpong (2015), unchecked oil firm activities have led to widespread land infertility and water pollution, negatively affecting crop production and aquatic life.

The specific case of Ibeno exemplifies these impacts. Sampson (2020) recounted the 2011 oil spill's severe repercussions on local fishing communities, where entire fish populations were wiped out, leaving families devastated. Frequent oil spills have also driven fish populations into deeper waters due to gas flaring, resulting in dwindling catches for smaller-scale fishers (UNEP Report, 2021). In coastal areas like Ibeno, only those with the means to access deeper waters with advanced equipment can maintain their fishing activities, while others continue to face heightened economic hardships due to environmental degradation.

The picture below shows the volume of oil spilled into Akwa Ibom State environment and water ways by ExxonMobil.



Source: Department of Petroleum Resources (2016)



Source; [DPR, 2023]

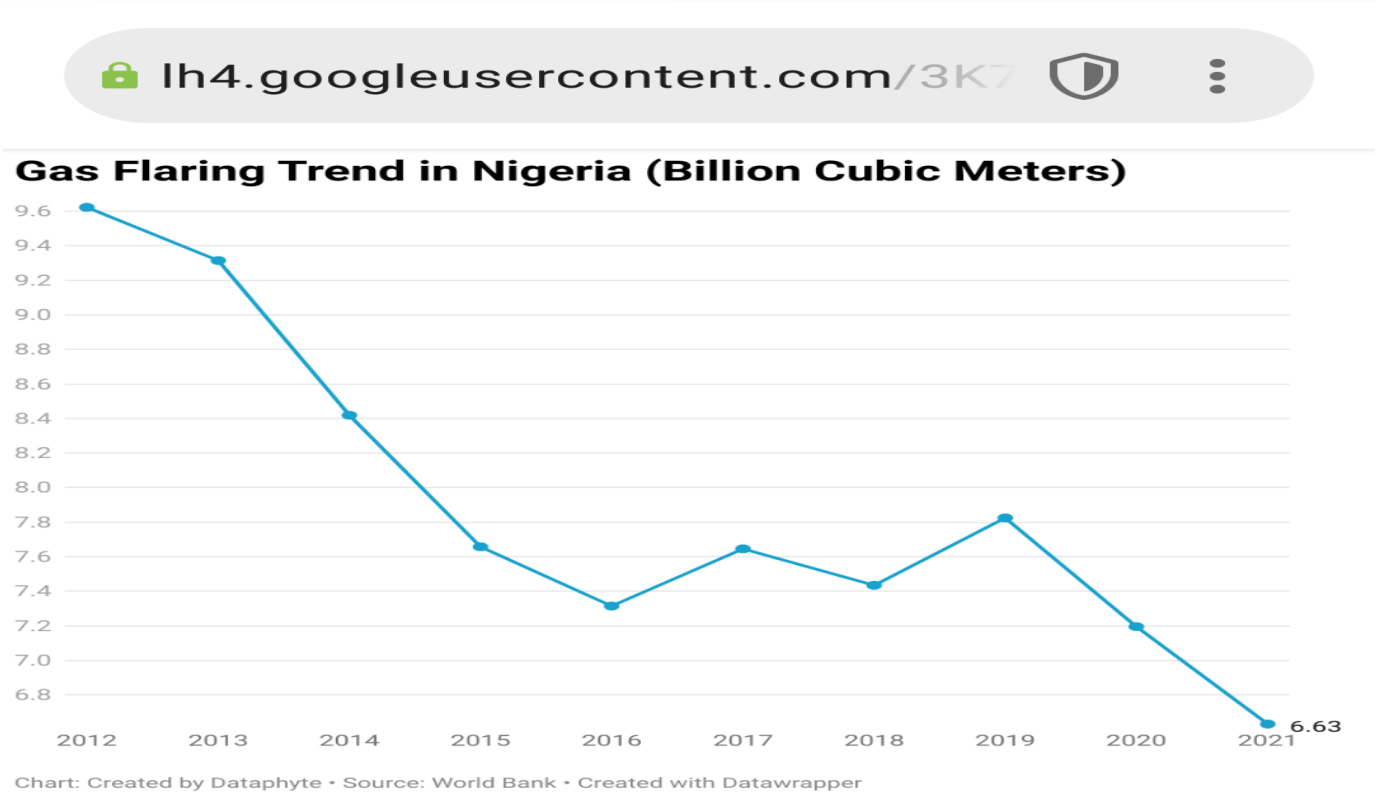
Gas flaring and health- risk on the environment and inhabitants of the host communities in Akwa Ibom State:

Gas flaring in Akwa Ibom State has caused severe environmental degradation, climate disruption, and health crises, impacting local ecosystems and communities. The flaring process releases harmful pollutants, including methane, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides, which deteriorate natural systems and threaten sustainable development (Olawuyi, 2021; Akinola et al., 2022; Sampson, 2020). As a major oil-producing region, Akwa Ibom suffers from significant health issues linked to gas flaring, such as respiratory diseases, skin rashes, gastrointestinal disorders, and increased cancer rates (Bassey, 2015; Ugochukwu, 2021). The extensive oil infrastructure—pipelines, flow stations, and flare sites disrupts local economies, rendering fertile land barren and exacerbating food insecurity (Bassey, 2015; Ugochukwu, 2021). Elevated temperatures from flaring also contribute to dehydration and heart conditions, particularly in Ibeno's Mkpanak and Atabrikang communities (Amu, 2016; Eteng, 2019).

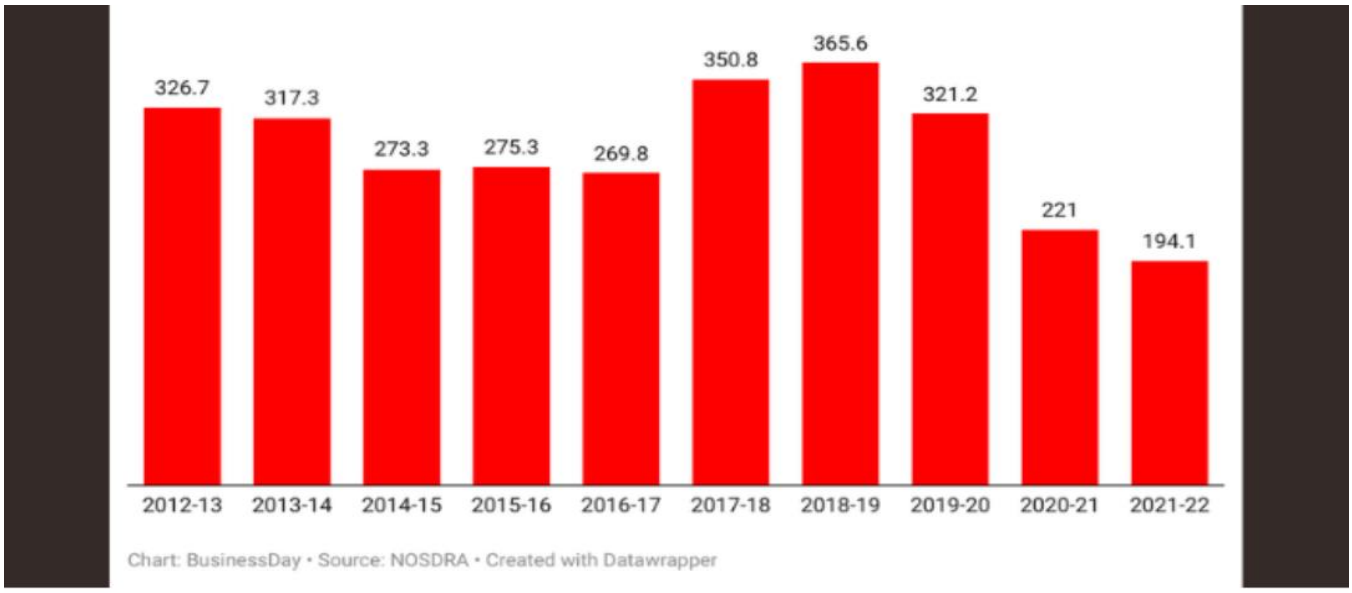
Acid rain, resulting from flaring emissions, has caused infrastructural damage, corroding zinc roofs and contaminating groundwater, forcing residents to use expensive, hazardous materials like asbestos (Etuk, 2021; Sampson, 2020). The ExxonMobil terminal in Mkpanak exemplifies this environmental injustice, with local communities suffering the consequences of oil profits while enduring pollution (Ebong, 2018). Bassey (2018) estimates that flared gas, if captured, could generate approximately $86 million daily, enough to power West Africa.

Gas flaring also accelerates climate change, increases ozone depletion, and disrupts plant and animal life, posing long-term socio-economic and health risks (UNEP, 2021; UNDP, 2000; Atah, 2000). These factors highlight the urgent need for stricter environmental policies, enforcement measures, and sustainable alternatives to mitigate these detrimental effects.

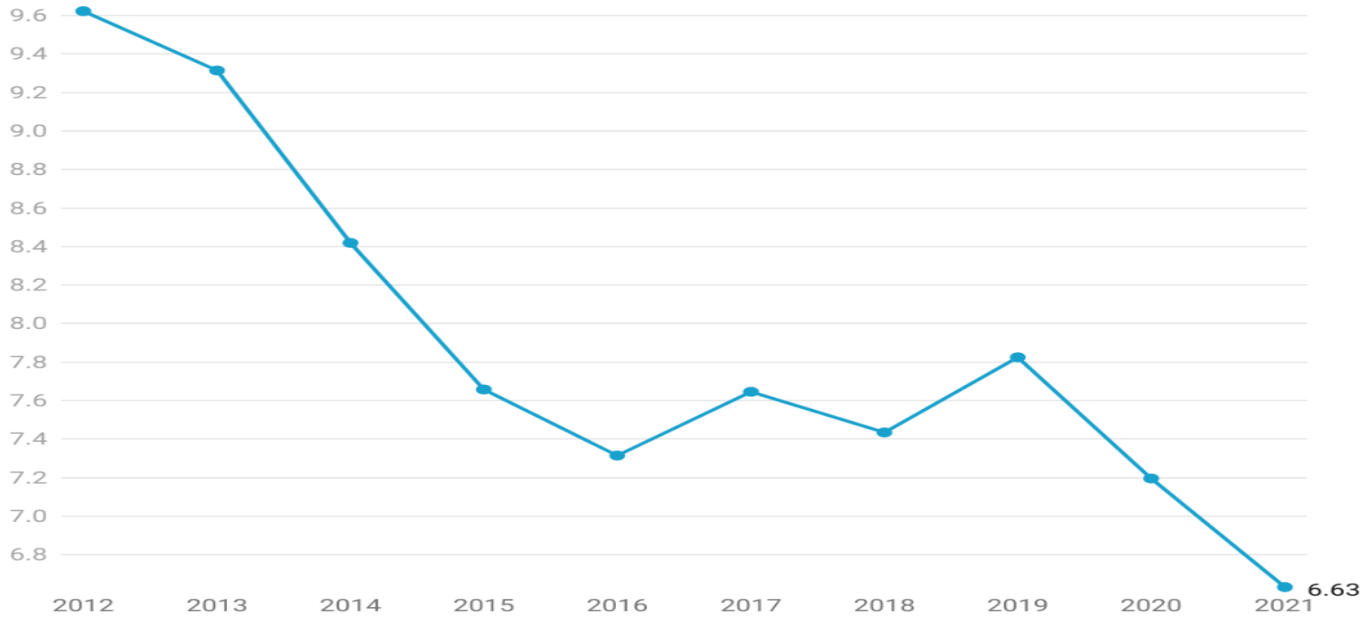
The pictures below show the quantity of gas flared in Akwa Ibom State by ExxonMobil in Atabrikang, Ibeno Local Government Area



Source [world bank 2022]



Source [DPR, 2023]



Source (NESREA, 2023)

The Challenges towards Effective Implementation of Environmental Protection Policies Nigeria

The ineffective implementation of environmental protection policies in Nigeria is attributed to several challenges identified by scholars. Okorodudu-Fubara (2017) emphasized inadequate funding, which limits environmental agencies' ability to enforce laws and programs due to a lack of resources, personnel, and technology. Ogbuigwe (2018) extended this argument to local governments, which struggle with enforcement due to insufficient financial support from higher authorities, leading to poor environmental management, particularly in rural areas.

Corruption and governance issues further weaken enforcement efforts. Oloyede (2021) highlighted how bribery and fraud undermine regulatory agencies like NESREA, with facility owners evading penalties and fraudulent officials extorting businesses. Addressing corruption is essential to enhancing accountability and

compliance. Ayodele and Onuoha (2020) identified the absence of mandatory pollution reporting by industries as another major gap, particularly in the oil sector, allowing companies to evade responsibility. Strengthening legal frameworks to mandate environmental reporting is crucial.

Technological deficiencies also hinder monitoring efforts. Eze and Okafor (2022) noted that outdated equipment and manual data collection impede accurate pollution assessment, calling for investments in modern environmental monitoring technologies. Constitutional limitations further weaken enforcement, as Ibrahim (2021) pointed out that Nigeria's Constitution does not guarantee enforceable environmental rights, making it difficult to hold polluters accountable. Legal barriers, including strict locus standi requirements, prevent communities from seeking environmental justice (Eze, 2021), highlighting the need for judicial reforms.

Inter-agency conflicts and structural inefficiencies complicate governance. Adebayo (2022) observed overlapping mandates among agencies, leading to inefficiencies, while Ibrahim (2021) argued for a centralized oversight body to improve coordination. Public participation remains limited, with policies often developed without community input (Oloyede, 2020). Adapting regulations to local contexts and increasing community engagement would enhance compliance and effectiveness. Addressing these financial, legal, technological, and governance challenges is essential for improving Nigeria's environmental policy implementation.

Summary of Findings:

The study analyzed the impact of multinational oil companies on environmental degradation in oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State, focusing on three research questions. Findings revealed that ExxonMobil's operations have negatively affected the environment, consistent with Umoh and Okon (2023), who highlighted how oil spills and gas operations have degraded biodiversity and agricultural land. They emphasized the adverse effects on human health and local economies. Similarly, Aluko and Effiong (2022) pointed out that environmental degradation has led to productivity losses in the Niger Delta, disrupting fishing, farming, and hunting. Onwuka (2023) further noted that crude oil exploration has damaged soil, forests, and water bodies, forcing many farmers to migrate, increasing pressure on resources elsewhere.

Regarding the second research question, oil operations were found to release harmful hydrocarbons, causing gas flaring, extreme heat, and industrial waste disposal, which have negatively affected public health (Abubakar, 2021). Okorie and Isu (2020) identified health issues such as respiratory diseases, tumors, and malnutrition in affected communities. The study's third hypothesis revealed that ineffective enforcement of environmental policies has worsened environmental management in the Niger Delta. Okoye (2021) observed that despite existing regulations, weak implementation has allowed multinational oil companies to continue polluting the environment unchecked. Consequently, the Niger Delta remains highly vulnerable to environmental degradation.

Conclusion:

The study highlights ExxonMobil's significant role in exacerbating environmental challenges in Akwa Ibom State, negatively impacting crop yields, public health, land productivity, and farm income. Oil operations have severely degraded environmental health, particularly in Mkpanak, Atabrikang, and Iwo Ukpum within Ibeno Local Government Area. Crude oil spills in these areas result from equipment failure, sabotage, human error, corrosion, blowouts, engineering mistakes, natural causes, third-party interference, erosion, and accidents. Despite government interventions, the Niger Delta continues to suffer from soil infertility, air pollution, soil erosion, and water contamination. Institutional frameworks to mitigate environmental damage have proven ineffective due to persistent challenges, including widespread corruption. Officials often exploit environmental violators for personal gain, while

funds allocated for environmental protection are misappropriated, further deepening the region's environmental crisis.

Recommendations:

I. Government should enforce compliance on pay as you flare laws. Hence, if such money is realized by the host communities, it will be use to embark on projects and programmes that will cushion the effect of gas flaring within the host communities of Akwa Ibom State.

II. The Federal and the State government through FEPA, ministry of Niger Delta, Ministry of Environment, NOSDRA, NESREA and all other stakeholders in oil and gas sector should revisit and review the existing environmental and oil drilling laws with the vie of updating them to international ,environmentally friendly standard.

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