

Oil Exploitation and Conflict in the Kegbara Dere Community in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Annotation: This study investigated the relationship between oil extraction and conflict in local communities in Ogoni with particular emphasis on the activities of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in the Kegbara Dere community, Nigeria. It adopted the frustration-aggression theory as its framework of analysis to explain how the nature of oil exploitation fuels environmental and social conflicts. Interviews of community members in Kegbara Dere complemented the information from textbooks which accounted for the sources of data in this work. The study concluded that the extractive activities of SPDC in the Kegbara Dere community adversely affected the lives, livelihoods and environment of the people. The findings are that oil spillage and degradation were the major causes of conflict in the Kegbara Dere community. The study also found that the struggle by political factions within Kegbara Dere for control of traditional authority structures to control the ongoing environmental clean-up programme is another source of conflict in the community. It therefore recommended a more realistic approach and cooperation from the community to support the ongoing Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) clean-up programme. The political factions in the community should also resort to dialogue in the resolution of disputes and live peacefully while carrying out their legitimate tasks.

Keywords: Oil & Gas, Exploitation, Community Conflict, Kegbara Dere and SPDC.

Introduction

Nigeria is not a stranger to resource conflicts, especially oil-related ones, and more recently, violent clashes between farmers and herders over land and forests in different parts of the country (Maiangwa & Ahmadu, 2017). These natural resource-induced conflicts in no small measure affect the security and socio-economic development of the Nigerian State. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is one of the most blessed deltas in the world, in both human and material resources (Ntor, 2021). Before the discovery of oil and gas in the region, agriculture was the dominant occupation of the people in the area and the soil was very fertile to support the growth of any type of agricultural products. After crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity in Oloibiri, in the present day Bayelsa State in 1956, exploration and exploitation of crude oil continued to result in environmental degradation, soil impoverishment, pollution, loss of aquatic life and biodiversity and conflict among others (Meshach, 2019). This was aggravated by the inability of the multinational

companies involved in the exploration and exploitation of crude oil, and the federal government to adequately mitigate the consequences of their activities in the region.

The extractive activities and oil exploitation of the oil multinationals, especially Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), the pioneering and the largest hydrocarbon exploration and production company in Nigeria are adversely affecting the lives, livelihoods and environment of the oil-producing communities (it significantly impacts on the atmosphere, soils and sediments, surface and groundwater, marine environment and terrestrial ecosystems) and discharges of petroleum hydrocarbon and petroleum-derived waste streams have caused environmental pollution, adverse human health effects, socioeconomic problems and degradation of host communities in the oil-producing State (Sakib, 2021).

Conflicts in oil-producing communities began as community agitations against multinationals in the 1970s. They accused the oil multinationals of environmental degradation, neglect of community development and short-changing of communities in compensatory payments for damages to property caused by oil spillages, construction of oil infrastructure and seismic activities during oil exploration. The conflict later transformed from community agitations against oil companies to the emergence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with the citizens against the State and oil companies, the emergence and radicalization of the youth movement, and subsequent metamorphoses of youth groups to militias which led to the insurgency (Osaghae, Olarinmoye and Okhomina 2007, Ikelegbe 2014).

The above was a replica of what the study area, Kegbara Dere in Gokana Local Government Area, Rivers State experienced as a result of oil exploitation in the community. The choice of this community was based on the fact that it was rich in oil and gas which attracted oil companies to the area. Evidence has shown that oil drilling commenced within the community in the late 50s with the drilling of the first oil well (Bomu oil well in 1957). It is pertinent to put on record that whereas the first exploitable oil came from Oloibiri, in the present-day Bayelsa State, the first exportable crude oil was from the Bomu oil well in Kegbara Dere in 1958. Again, it is on record that during the years of active oil exploration and exploitation in Ogoni land, the daily production rate ranged from about 28,000 bbls. Of this, daily production from Kegbara Dere alone accounted for over 50% (Over 14,000 bbls per day). Regrettably, except for the adversely degraded environment and the subsequent poverty in the community, there is nothing to show for such massive contributions.

To start oil exploration and exploitation in rural communities, multinational oil companies are required by law to make payments to the federal government. Customary and statutory payments are also made to “host communities,” or those who own the land and fishing grounds where drilling or other activities take place. It is expected that this will bring development to the communities. Unfortunately, these policies have fuelled intra and inter-communal conflict with particular reference to the Kegbara Dere community by giving more power and benefits to the wrong persons. These, in the long run, led to the violent conflict experienced in the community. The discovery and exploitation of oil and gas rather than being a blessing is, therefore, a curse in the community where they are found due to poor management, control and distribution of the oil and gas despite the huge benefits they were contributing to the nation’s economy (Okereke, 2019).

Again, the extractive activities of the multinational oil company that were supposed to attract development to the community led to conflict, and the destruction of lives, livelihoods and the

environment of the people. The people of the community are prone to several health hazards and socio-economic constraints which for long has made the people more volatile resulting in youth restiveness. Conflicts between youths and community leaders, youths and government agencies and youth against multinational companies are prominent in the oil community. This has led to the indigenous people demanding compensation as well as control of the oil wealth. In Ogoni land, this demand has led to a confrontation between activists and Multinational Oil Companies operating in the state. Initially, the struggle started peacefully until the killing of a renowned activist and playwright in the region, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others from Ogoni land.

As revealed by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in its report on Ogoni land, petroleum hydrocarbon contamination in Kegbara Dere has penetrated five (5) metres deep, polluting groundwater, sediments, and vegetation. The report also covers the extent of environmental contamination and threat to human health, air greatly contaminated with excess VOC and Benzene in the community and environs. Research has shown that the effect of the continuous release of crude oil into the environment has caused ecosystem degradation (biodiversity depletion), and water contamination which in turn comprises environmental integrity, with significant negative consequences on food security and human health in the community.

In the Kegbara Dere community, after Shell stopped oil exploration in 1993, they left their facilities in the community. These facilities continued to leak due to lack of maintenance and sabotage and spilt into farmland and rivers before Shell responded. Whenever it occurred, it caused conflict between the community and Shell before it was cleaned up. When the contract is given to contractors, it goes to the wrong contractor and when compensation is paid, some people are also denied from benefitting. The precarious situation led to the conflict that the community experienced as a response to the failure of the oil company to respond to their environment and other needs. This is the point of my departure.

Statement of the problem

In recent times, oil exploration and exploitation have negatively impacted the lives and environment of the Kegbara Dere community in the Niger Delta region, and such a negative impact on the people is costly to ignore and bear. Scholars have carried out studies on oil exploration and exploitation; for instance, Ikelegbe (2005) examined the economy of conflict in resource conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It was found that a conflict economy comprising an intensive and violent struggle for resource opportunities, inter- and intra-communal/ethnic conflicts over resources, and the theft and trading of refined and crude oil has blossomed since the 1990s. Nwokolo (2013) investigated oil-producing communities in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Delta State. Erondy (2014:49) also explored conflicts in oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta. Similarly, Albert et al. (2018) investigated the impacts of the oil spills on communities' livelihood structures and their influence on restiveness in selected Niger Delta-affected communities. These scholars, however, failed to carry out studies on the Kegbara Dere community in the Niger Delta region. Therefore, the present research is posed to fill this identified gap by investigating the impact and implications of oil exploration and exploitation in the Kegbara Dere community in the Niger Delta region, with particular attention to the conflict associated with the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) clean-up.

Literature Review

Several scholars centred their review on resource and oil conflicts. Ikelegbe (2005) examines the economy of conflict in resource conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It was found that a conflict economy comprising an intensive and violent struggle for resource opportunities, inter- and intra-communal/ethnic conflicts over resources, and the theft and trading of refined and crude oil has blossomed since the 1990s.

The Nwokolo (2013) study uses the oil-producing communities in Nigeria, with particular focus on Delta State. It seeks to explore the extent to which the presence of oil fuels violent conflicts in these communities and how the moulding of socio-economic and political structures in local oil-producing communities by the presence of oil resources gives rise to economic opportunism and grievance characteristics. The research demonstrated that oil resources fuel violent conflicts in oil-producing communities through the changes they bring to local socio-economic conditions.

Brown & Sukontasap (2016) raised the desire to re-examine the conflict of the Niger-Delta amnesty conflicts and resolution from different perspectives, taking into account different factors that characterize the resilience of the conflict as well as the prevailing success to manage the conflict, which often goes unnoticed. This study examined the complex interaction between the socio-political, economic, and environmental factors that drive the conflict in the region, as well as their impact on the security of the nation as a whole. The study discovered that the complex interaction between socio-political, economic, and environmental factors drives conflict in the region, as well as their impact on the security of the lives of the people and the nation as a whole.

Albert et al. (2018) investigated the impact of the oil spills on communities' livelihood structures and their influence on restiveness in selected Niger Delta-affected communities. The study shows a high impact on entire communities, with different factors contributing to the increase in social aspects of the affected. The paper makes a recommendation to all stakeholders within the oil industry and the multinationals to improve their strategies and contingency planning in tackling oil spill-related issues and adhere to the community's plight when appropriate.

Raimi and Iwekumo (2019) researched the issue of conflict over resources in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria using the Marxist variant of the political economy approach. It was argued that long years of marginalization, which manifested in the widespread infrastructural deficit and low human development reality in the region, provided the required incentive for militia-style agitations and violent conflicts for justice in revenue allocation to the region and resource control. The paper recommends, among others, the need to address structural historical imbalances in the country's fiscal federalism as well as proactive development interventions.

Afigbo and Onyishi (2018) investigated the impact of oil exploration on human security in Kegbara Dere in another study. According to the study, the activities of oil companies in the community have resulted in environmental degradation and increased poverty, which has led to social unrest and violence. The study also discovered that the community's conflict was fuelled by a lack of resources and an unequal distribution of benefits from oil exploration.

In addition, Oruitemeka and Akpoghome (2015) investigated the impact of oil exploration on the environment and health in Kegbara Dere. According to the study, the activities of oil companies in the community caused severe environmental degradation, which resulted in the loss of livelihoods

and increased poverty. The study also discovered that environmental degradation had caused health issues such as respiratory diseases, skin rashes, and cancer.

Praise-God and Obia (2020) investigated the impact of oil exploration on the socioeconomic development of the Kegbara Dere community. According to the study, oil companies' activities in the community have resulted in environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods, and increased poverty. The study also discovered that the community's conflict was fuelled by a lack of resources and an unequal distribution of benefits from oil exploration.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the frustration-aggression theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. The theory argues that frustration most often leads to aggression, whereas the displacement hypothesis suggests that aggression can be redirected towards a substitute target if the original target is unavailable or difficult to attack (Bushman & Anderson, 2018). The cognitive neo-associationistic model suggests that frustration can activate negative emotions and thoughts, which can lead to aggression, and that these negative emotions and thoughts are more likely to occur in contexts where aggression is more acceptable or normalized (Bushman & Anderson, 2018).

The explanation of the frustration-aggression theory is anchored on the fact that aggression is not seen as a mainly causal factor, as some researchers have viewed it; rather, it is its outcome that manifests in the form of frustration, and whenever people feel that their legitimate expectations and desires are cut off or denied by others overtly or covertly in line with how society is structured, this will lead to a feeling of disappointment. When this occurs, it will make the individual vent his anger through violence that will be targeted at those perceived to have been responsible for his ordeal. In Rivers State, Kegbara Dere, and other oil-producing communities, to be precise, the agitation and clamour over issues of access, management, and control of natural resources by oil-producing states is dependent on this theory. These oil-producing communities feel marginalized and frustrated by the Federal Government of Nigeria, oil multinational companies, and local criminal collaborators.

The relevance of the theory to this work cannot be overemphasized. In the first place, the control, management, and allocation of oil-related benefits accruable from the oil company to the community that is being controlled and hijacked by a few people and how those who feel or perceive that they are shortchanged of the sharing and benefits needed and crucial for their lives may cause conflict or embark on criminal activity to obtain the things they perceive that are massively deprived. This unequal allocation of oil-related benefits from oil contracts, job opportunities, and scholarships led to conflict and violence.

Methodology

Methodologically, the study relied on the case study method for collecting primary data through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focused group discussions (FGDs). The case study is Kegbara Dere in Gokana LGA, Rivers State. Kegbara Dere was selected for analysis for three main reasons. First, the community is very rich in oil deposits on Ogoni land. The first oil well was discovered in the community after the Oloibiri oil discovery, which is called Bomu, an oil field that hosts the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). Secondly, the community experienced conflict as a result of the poor management, control, and distribution of oil benefits. Thirdly, the community

has a well-structured governing system that comprises the paramount ruler, deputy paramount ruler, council of chiefs, Community Development Committee (CDC), young men house (youth body), boundary and land committee, project and technical committee, functional and statutory governance council, and women house.

A total of twelve (12) persons were engaged in FGD, with participants selected from the council of chiefs, CDC, youth, women groups, repentant cultists, women groups, religious leaders, and people with disabilities (PwDs), while nine (9) KII interviews were also conducted among the key community stakeholders that were purposefully selected based on their experience and knowledge of the issue being investigated. The data collected from both FGD and KIIs was supplemented by secondary data obtained from available data in the form of written works, textbooks, magazines, daily, weekly, or quarterly newspapers, journals, archived materials, and online databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, among others. This research work also explored unpublished theses, reports, and maps from government agencies, oil companies' periodicals showing diagrams, etc. No doubt, the information obtained from these sources provided a pivotal insight and gave a balanced representation of the issue under study, and the information obtained from these sources provided very useful insights for this study.

The findings from the KIIs and FGD were also used to support our analysis. We argue that the failure to promptly respond to oil spillage caused by the equipment of SPDC and bunkering activity is causing conflict in the Kegbara-Dere community. The factional struggle to claim traditional authority was a major cause of conflict, while a lack of employment opportunities for the youth is another cause of conflict in the community. Our argument was confirmed by FGD and KII participants, who provided specific examples and claims that were used as empirical evidence to support our analysis.

Oil and Gas Business in Kegbara Dere Community

The history of the oil and gas business in Kegbara Dere will not be complete without a cursory look at the oil and gas business in the Niger Delta region. The genesis of the Niger Delta struggle started with the discovery of oil and gas in Oliobiri in 1956. Since then, the Nigerian economy has shifted mainly from agriculture to oil and gas. Toby Shelly (2005), citing OPEC data, has shown that the Nigerian economy has been dependent on oil since 1972 as a revenue roller-coaster because it accounted for over 93% of export value, 99% in 1977, and 95% in 2002. Together with gas, it presently accounts for 97% of Nigeria's foreign exchange revenue from 1915. This is a huge economic resource with fantastic financial benefits, but at what ecological implications and environmental costs? Therefore, oil extraction and exploration in the Niger Delta region have been a double-edged sword for the people living in this region. This is because increasing oil exploration has made the region economically and socially poor due to the extensive environmental degradation and ensuing socio-economic disruptions and poverty (Ikelegbe 2005). In the same vein, the activities of multinational oil companies, particularly SPDC, which operated in Kegbara Dere in Gokana Local Government Area, Rivers State, for several decades, have had an impact on the community.

According to a report by the Kegbara Dere community project committee (2021), The community harbours the highest number of oil and gas-related facilities in Ogoniland and even in the Niger Delta area, with about 40 oil wells, 3 flow stations tied to a mega flow station, a giant manifold

housing the 24/28 Bomu-Bonny Trans-Niger pipelines, gas flare stand pits, 24 dug borrow pits, perimeter linkage access roads, tank farms and manifold sites, helipad base camps, 2 inshore marine bases, crisscrossing delivery and flow line Right of Way (RoW), and abundant un-appraised oil and gas reservoirs that occupied land areas of various spread ranging from approximately one to five hectares on both dry and wet land. It harbours assets such as several productive oil and gas-related wells. Over time, the extractive activities of SPDC and oil exploitation in the Kegbara Dere community adversely affected the rivers for fishing, polluted the rivers, destroyed the mangroves, killed aquatic animals, and destroyed the farmland and environment.

Another community chief during the KII interviews revealed that after SPDC stopped oil exploration in Kegbara Dere in 1993, they left their facilities in the community. These facilities continued to leak due to lack of maintenance and sabotage and spilled into farmland and rivers before Shell responded. Whenever it occurred, it caused conflict between the community and SPDC before it was cleaned up. This corroborated the investigation conducted by Oruitemeka and Akpoghome (2015) on the impact of oil exploration on the environment and health in Kegbara Dere. According to the study, the activities of oil companies in the community caused severe environmental degradation, which resulted in the loss of livelihoods and increased poverty levels. The study also discovered that environmental degradation had caused health issues such as respiratory diseases, skin rashes, and cancer. The findings of the study were also supported by information from the FGD. This generally results in the community and other indigenous people seeking and demanding compensation, and this demand usually results in massive negative face-offs and confrontations between human rights activists and oil multinationals. The struggle that commenced as a peaceful and harmless protest changed massively to an armed dispute after the gruesome murder of a well-known activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, along with eight other people from Ogoni. The current wonton of agitation after this includes abducting expert workers, bombing installations, and the destruction of lives and properties. This situation made Wilson (2012) say that the oil and gas deposits and installations in communities where they are deposited have become a curse rather than a blessing.

Oil operation processes in oil-producing communities are supposed to make certain payments to the Nigerian government. Expected and constitutional payments are equally made to “host rural areas,” or those whose people have legal ownership of land and fish grounds in which drilling or other operations are carried out. Being designated as a host rural area, therefore, brings appreciable benefits like compensation, funds for rural development, labour opportunities, and security contracts. Oil firms negotiate these contractual terms and agreements with people who are supposed to be rural host area heads, notably traditional heads or chiefs. These programs have triggered inter-communal disputes by channelling massive amounts of money to tribal heads, most of whom would never share these benefits with their people. This, over a long time, triggers vehement disputes experienced in several areas within oil-producing rural host areas within Rivers State.

Oil Exploitation and Conflict in the Kegbara Dere Community

The general problems confronting the study community that are causing conflict based on oil exploration and exploitation by oil companies were determined based on the analyzed responses from the KIIs and FGD. The problems include destruction of aquatic life, pollution of sources of potable water, non-payment of compensation, denial of scholarship or employment, divide and rule, reduction in crop yield, poverty, and political factions.

It is also important to reflect on the causes and nature of the conflict in the Kegbara Dere community in specific terms. According to FGD respondents in the Kegbara Dere community, after SPDC stopped oil exploration in 1993, the community continued to experience conflict emanating from poor maintenance of SPDC's oil facilities that caused oil spillage, conflict over contracts, and failure to benefit from the sharing of oil benefits. According to an investigation conducted by Praise-God and Obia (2020) on the impact of oil exploration on the socioeconomic development of Kegbara Dere, oil companies' activities in the community have resulted in environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods, and increased poverty. The study also discovered that the community's conflict was fuelled by a lack of resources and an unequal distribution of benefits from oil exploration.

During the FGD, it was revealed that artisanal refining and illegal bunkering are also fueling conflict in the community. The environment is conducive to bunkering and illegal refining as a result of spillage from oil pipelines. It is convenient for unemployed youth to tap oil from the pipes for illegal refining. They are making enough money from illegal businesses while at the same time destroying the environment. The unhealthy rivalry among the perpetrators of this illegal act is causing conflict in the community. One of the community youths confirmed that those who are embarking on illegal refining and bunkering are making so much money that it would be difficult for them to stop the activity without any alternative livelihoods. As part of an effort to get another means of survival, the community leadership assured them that anyone who renounced the illegal activity would be employed at the site of the environmental clean-up because the community has about seven (7) clean-up sites.

One of the youths stated that the unnecessary interference of state agencies in the community political structures and competition for chieftaincy titles is giving rise to conflict, insecurity, and cultism in the community. This explains why women and young girls cannot freely go to their farmland; some community members cannot also organize functions or ceremonies in the community without seeing or paying ransom to cult groups. Attacks on innocent community members and the destruction of lives and properties are also common in the community. In the same vein, Anikpo (2015) revealed that other causes of conflict associated with natural resources are feelings of exploitation and marginalization, which accompany unfair sharing of oil benefits, degradation of the environment, and loss of traditional livelihoods due to long years of oil exploration, the failure of corporate groups like the multinational oil companies to keep their own part of the General Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU), and the 'divide and rule' tactics of the oil companies.

One of the interviewees noted that oil-related conflict in the community is taking on another dimension and trend as a result of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project's (HYPREP) clean-up of hydrocarbon-impacted sites, restoration of artisanal refining sites, and other polluted sites in the community. According to the bi-annual report on the Ogoni clean-up (Jan.–June 2022) by Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), under complaints management, this is an area where they have observed almost no progress since the monitoring project commenced. All communities visited, including Kegbara Dere, lamented the absence of the Community Representative Advisory Committee (CRAC) or information on how to channel complaints to them. There is widespread feeling in communities that there should be more public information on the CRAC, clear ways to

contact them, and a potentially expanded membership to include members of all impacted communities, which would help make this group more accessible.

One of the interviewees stated that since the commencement of phase one (1) of the work, some of the community leaders are not happy and are fueling the crisis because HYPREP came when the leadership of the community was not in their control. Early in 2023, when the opposing group heard that HYPREP was coming to pay homage to the community, they went to court to challenge their coming and also wrote a threatening letter to HYPREP officials. They also went ahead to mobilize boys to cause conflict in the community in order to claim that the community is not conducive and safe for the clean-up. Fortunately, the leadership at home was able to put the situation under control with their own local arrangements and the support of police officers.

Other interviewees maintained that the conflict took another pattern when some of the leaders that were dissolved went ahead to crown an unpopular candidate as the community's paramount ruler after giving him financial and moral support, but the said paramount ruler did not enjoy the support of majority members of the community. When the kingmakers and elders crowned the present paramount ruler, Maxwell Gberesuu, the opposing group sponsored boys to cause a crisis in the community and went ahead to arrest the new paramount ruler, but the community women protested and secured his release.

The conflict associated with the clean-up is affecting the peace of the community as a result of interest because everybody wants to be in charge, to direct, to have a slot, and to control the process. Some powerful community members are using every means to fight the authority in the community. As part of an effort to create an enabling and peaceful environment in the community, a technical committee and an arbitrary committee were created to deal with all the issues. A community congress was called recently at the community town square to address community members about the need to support the remediation work and to conduct themselves during the process. They were also advised to stop artisanal refining and bunkering, which are further polluting the environment.

Problems caused by oil company operating in Kegbara Dere

Available data and evidence revealed that the problems created by Shell (SPDC) in the study community as a result of her exploration and exploitation activities are multi-dimensional in nature ranging from; environmental degradation caused by oil spills and gas flaring, divide and rule tactics, encouraging intra communal conflict, awarding of contracts to contractors of their interest, failure to respond to the cleaning of polluted sites, poor or inadequate maintenance of oil facilities, interference in community politics, failure to implement the agreement in the General Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU), poor implementation of Corporate Social Responsibilities, giving surveillance contracts to wrong persons and sponsoring of one youth group against the other.

Again, the failure of SPDC to pay compensation to the community as a result of the destruction of their livelihoods and environment is fueling conflict. One of the PwDs interviewees from Kegbara Dere stated that oil spillage occurs in the community due to the failure of Shell to maintain their facilities and to respond to the oil spill when it occurs. It is also opening windows of opportunity for some youths to engage in bunkering and illegal oil refining activity in the community. The oil bunkering business is lucrative and, at the same time, breeds conflict in the community. Oftentimes,

SPDC engages the wrong local contractors who are their cronies to clean up spills, and when money is paid, only a few people benefit from the sharing. This situation always drives conflict among the youth in the community. One of the youth interviewees testified that in 2020, the action of SPDC led to the deaths of two youths in the community. One of the boys was shot at the site of the spillage as a result of the contract that was given to the wrong contractor.

Other problems caused by SDPC are that their acts and actions are encouraging and fueling intra- and inter-community conflict. In the same vein, oil exploitation in SPDC is generating general poverty in the community. This was a result of the destruction of means of livelihood such as fishing and farming.

Finally, FGD respondents mentioned that the undue interference of Shell (SPDC) in the appointment of the Board of Directors, Management Committee, and Advisory Committee in the ongoing Host Community Development Trust (HCDT) under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021 has the potential to cause conflict and the selection of the wrong community representatives into the committee.

Effects of Oil Exploitation in the Kegbara Dere Community

Oil extraction and exploitation activities in Kegbara Dere began in the colonial era by Shell D'archy. SPDC Nigeria Limited is the oil company operating in the community. Operations and standards in the oil industry are regulated through numerous enactments that seek to ensure the protection of the ecosystem. Oil companies are therefore mandated to ensure good oilfield practices. Unfortunately, evidence has shown that SPDC, from inception, has failed to adhere to such operational obligatory standards and continues to conduct its operations with outright neglect of internationally recognized standards on ecosystem pollution. As revealed by the UNEP in its report on Ogoniland, petroleum hydrocarbon contamination in Kegbara Dere has penetrated 5 meters deep, polluting groundwater, sediments, and vegetation. The report also covers the extent of environmental contamination and the threat to human health, as well as air quality contamination with excess VOC and benzene in the community and its environs.

Research has further shown that the effects of the crude oil released into the environment have caused ecosystem degradation (biodiversity depletion) and water contamination, which in turn comprise environmental integrity with significant negative consequences for food security and human health in the community. The continued injection of crude oil into the Kegbara Dere environment has created chronic toxic conditions for resources, while the local source of domestic water and foodstuffs has been severely contaminated, and the health implications for community members cannot be overemphasized.

Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the government's failure to address the concerns of local communities has exacerbated the conflict in the Niger Delta region (Okonta & Douglas, 2001; Watts, 2013). The relationship between local communities and oil companies in the Niger Delta region has been marked by a lack of transparency and accountability, which has resulted in a breakdown of trust between the two parties (Kesby, 2017). The failure to consult with local communities and obtain their consent before beginning oil exploration activities has also contributed to the conflict (Amnesty International, 2011).

The Ogoni people have been at the forefront of the conflict with oil companies operating in the area of Kegbara Dere. The Ogoni people have been fighting for environmental justice and resource control, and their struggle gained international attention in the 1990s after the Nigerian government executed prominent Ogoni leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists (UNDP, 2020).

Since then, there have been reports of violence and human rights violations on both sides of the Kegbara Dere conflict between the Ogoni people and oil companies. Amnesty International published a report in 2011 detailing the Ogoni people's human rights violations, which included extrajudicial killings, torture, and forced evictions. The report also highlighted the negative environmental impacts of oil exploration, such as water pollution, soil contamination, and air pollution. This has had a negative impact on the Ogoni people's health and livelihoods, as they rely on farming and fishing for a living.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn from the study in the Kegbara community: unnecessary interference of the state agencies in the community political structures and competition for chieftaincy titles is giving rise to conflict, insecurity, and cultism in the community. The community also experienced conflict or crisis as a result of the failure to benefit from the SPDC Trans Niger Pipeline (TNP) that passes through the community. SPDC uses the pipeline to evacuate crude from oil fields in Rivers and parts of Bayelsa States to the Bonny Crude Oil Export Terminal. The community has borne the brunt of the negative impact of SPDC while seeing little benefit in return.

Again, the Kegbara Dere community will continue to experience disputes as long as SPDC continues to use divide-and-rule tactics. Evidence has shown that SPDC operating in the community sometimes used divide and rule tactics among the youths or representatives to cause division in the community. Again, they are fond of giving lucrative contracts to their preferred or unqualified contractors in order to further cause disputes in the community. Again, there are lots of oil spills that have occurred unattended to in the community, and in a few cases, when spills occurred, SPDC often engaged surveillance workers to protect the site, which always caused further disputes among community members.

In addition, community representatives and leaders such as the Cluster Management Committee and General Memorandum of Understanding Committee, through some of their actions and inactions, have been shortchanging some of the benefits that are meant for the community due to their selfish interests rather than being the main actors taking the lead in the initiatives that will lead to genuine community development and transformation.

Finally, the study concludes that the impact of oil exploitation and conflict in the Kegbara Dere community resulted in the absence of investors, a lack of basic infrastructure, rural-urban migration, negligence by the government, and a hostile investment environment, among other things, which will continue to hinder the socio-economic and infrastructural development of the community.

Recommendations

The following are therefore recommended to address the lingering oil-induced conflicts in Kegbara Dere and other host communities to SPDC Trans Niger Pipeline (TNP);

1. SPDC should respond swiftly whenever there are oil spills in the community.
2. Adequate compensation must be paid in addition to clean-up and remediation according to best practice.
3. There is also a need to implement and enforce policies that will regulate the operations of SPDC in a way that their operation will not affect the lives, livelihoods and environment of host communities.
4. SPDC should organize skills acquisition and empowerment programmes that are well packaged to ensure that the youths benefit especially through employment opportunities and scholarships to reduce cult rivalry and criminal activities.
5. This paper also recommends a more realistic approach and cooperation from the community to support the ongoing HYPREP clean-up. The clean-up exercise will not only provide employment opportunities for the community youths but will also meet the basic needs and aspirations of the people of the Kegbara Dere community. It will lead to the restoration of the environment, improved livelihoods, agricultural development and increased community income-yielding ventures (palm oil mill, rice mill, cassava mill) and so on. It is the absence of these infrastructural facilities that is fuelling conflict and encouraging the youth to be involved in criminal activities.
6. Finally, effective implementation and monitoring of the Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs) under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) in 2021 will present a significant opportunity to support the equitable distribution of benefits from industry and to meet the development priorities of Kegbara Dere and other host communities.

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