

PICTORIAL DESCRIPTION OF DEGRADED NIGER DELTA ENVIRONMENT AND COPING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Having decided to present the challenges of Niger Delta environment using pictures and the aim was certainly achieved as some of the pictures truly represented happenings in the region. This study used descriptive research design. The study shows that the environment of the Niger Deltans are degraded and some persons in reaction to the perceived injustice to the people and its environment; decided to organise themselves under the aegis of differing names in an attempt to survive adopted strategies and most of these survival strategies in no small measures contribute to the despoiling or degrading of the environment. However, this paper is of the view that rather than adopting methods that would check the activities of the multi-national companies (MNCs), the people own their compounded environmental challenges as a result of wrong perception and beliefs. Therefore, this paper suggests that the people, MNCs and Federal Government should collaborate as to reduce to the barest minimum the degradation that is ongoing in the region. Next, that the people should form themselves as environmental watch dogs to forestall the assaults of MNCs activities on their environment. That the Federal Government should emphasize that the MNCs adopt international best practice models as it is done in their home nations. The above, when properly harnessed will automatically mean peace and harmony for all and sundry; as the environment will be healthy and the people too.

KEYWORDS: Pictures, Degradation, Environment, Coping Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

This contributor haven taken pains and time out to examine at any available opportunity to study the nature and quality of the Niger Delta environment and has observed that the Niger Delta people and environment are suffering heavily under the weight of the Multinational Corporation activities; has decided to pictorially present some of the perceived challenges for record purposes and for the public consumption.

The Niger Delta environment has attracted a worldwide interest on the basis of the position it occupies in Nigeria's economic productive structure which accounts for why, there are numerous and varied accounts by scholars and non-scholars.

However, the perspective by which this work attempts to contribute to Niger delta discourses is purely pictorial.

Pictures are live events captured electronically, processed and preserved for future record purposes. For the purpose of future easy recalls of the quality of the Niger Delta environment, this writer toured some areas of the Niger Delta and took photographs it considered necessary at different locations and for which they stand as the basis of this presentation. That is, to state that, as each picture is presented, the writer interprets it within the confines of scholarly discussion and thereafter, derives conclusion and suggestions. To further explain why pictures are chosen as the basis of analysis, I hereby cull from Webster's Dictionary the meaning of picture, and it is stated as "a representation or image on a surface, for example, a painting, drawing, print

or photograph, especially as a work of art; while Advanced English Dictionary posits that it is a visual representation of an object or scene or person or abstraction produced on a surface.

It is also discovered that those in Arts and Humanities, use pictures and paintings a lot in their studies; and I am of the view that pictures evoke the true effects of the ideals they are intended to convey, which justifies why I have engaged in this venture.

Picture 1. A WELL HEAD



Field work

A well head is a rotating axle through which crude oil is obtained or extracted from the ground for commercial purposes. An oil well can be serviced or shot down through the oil well head. Therefore, the siting of an oil wellhead in an area by the federal government, its agency and/or partners- the MNCS automatically excludes and restricts the indigenous people from utilising that piece of land for any benefit of theirs; be it social, economic or otherwise. That is why any area where oil wellheads are sited is considered as a “restricted area”.

The presence of oil well head in an area portends some degree of danger to the host community and people. For there may be salient loss of oil or gas into the environment. The presence of oil or gas in an environment affects the people’s health and economic life whether it is known or unknown to the onlooker.

The escape of gas or oil from a well head will affect the people’s economic and living style. This is because there can be the incidence of vegetation discoloration and water pollution in the area. In the event of the above therefore, it can cause some people in the region to adopt illicit means in order to survive; an action which can also stem the people against the government or its representatives.

PICTURE 2. HEAVY DUTY MACHINE



Field Work.

The heavy duty machines shown in this picture are not possessed, produced or used by the indigenes in attempting to produce their goods and services, rather they are the property of the expatriates who operate in the zone, whose sole aim is maximisation of profit. Maximisation of profit is the main aim of capitalism and capitalism is the current global economic system; Berbeskhina, (1985).

The heavy duty machines are employed to excavate the land and environment of the people, which thereafter create brough pits as would be seen in the next picture. The heavy duty machines when operational generate enormous noise. The noise from the heavy duty machines is responsible for noise pollution that becomes a source of problem to both man and animals. The animals run far away from the site of noise, which makes it near impossible for the indigenes to function as hunters as they can no longer catch games (animals).

The machines also alter the soil matrix and thereby lead to low agricultural production. The noise from the machines can also lead to loss of hearing in the people, emotional upset and palpitation. On the other hand, some of the people or natives may attempt to tamper with some parts of the machines in a bid to make money or create wealth for their survival.

PICTURE 3. CHILDREN SWIMMING IN A BOROUGH PIT



Field Work.

A closer look at this borough pit shows that children in the area use the pits for recreational activities as some are seen swimming in them.

These pits serve as water reservoir as receptacles were seen around the pit; and it also depicts that some communities use water from borough pits for some domestic activities. Lack of pipe-borne water in those areas clearly shows the differentiation and inequality that exist between the people, government and its agencies; which accounts for the strife that brew in communities when the people feel neglected and marginalised.

PICTURE 4: DROWNED CHILD



Field Work.

It is sad to see that a young lad is drowned in this borough pit. This incidence can be a source of rancour between the company and the community even though the former did not instruct the child to swim in the pit; rather because children are considered as wealth in Africa, especially male off springs. This is so because, they are viewed by all as family propagators or defenders of family legacies. The death of a child can warrant a destructive attack on multinational establishments' sites which may give rise to loss lives and properties and the attendant disharmony and insecurity that are seen to be growing in the area.

PICTURE 5. SCOOPING OF CRUDE OIL



Field Work.

Picture v: Shows a person scooping crude oil from a river with bucket, which may be as a direct cause of oil spill from broken pipes or excavated pipe as a result of sabotage or bunkering. The presence of oil on water leads to the death of water bodies and such water bodies lose their aesthetic value. Most youth take advantage of such abnormal circumstance to make quick money and some in the process lose their lives. The loss of lives may be as a result of fire incidence, attack by security operatives and even community members who attempt to protect their environment from degradation.

PICTURE 6. SHOWING DEAD SEA CREATURES



Field Work.

You can see a person holding dead aquatic creatures in his hands and the mark the crude oil has on his limbs. Whenever, crude oil spills into water and its environs it is observed that aquatic and soil microbial are affected as many of such creatures die and most times remedies do not come quickly to the people and their environment. This idea is collaborated by Sarre and Reddish (2000), who state that the biggest threat to most species comes from human activities and the most vulnerable species are the rarities... The fact that the people whose environment are devastated and are not compensated many a times, can be sources of conflict and anomic behavior in the region. Conversely, the effect of the crude oil on human body can lead to skin irritations and other infections. The skin is the external protective covering of human beings; Shier, Butler and Lewis (1996); and any damage on the skin means doom to the people.

PICTURE 7. WITHERING CASSAVA FARM



Field Work.

This picture shows a withering cassava plantation in the region. Cassava is one of the staple tuber foods in the country. It can be produced in commercial quantities as cash and food crop. Following the effect of crude oil on the farm, a family or community loses finances; which would affect their nutrition and the said people may not have reserved finances or food for survival, you may recall a popular saying that a hungry man is an angry man.

This picture further collaborates that the Niger Delta environment is properly degraded or compromised as the vegetation has lost its greenness, and so are the people suffering from unwanted social challenges. Since majority of the people are not gainfully employed and they may not have other sources of income, this can cause them to resort to barricading of the entrance of any of the fingered multinational company, rough handle any personnel and the situation may degenerate into civil unrest and loss of lives of all the groups involved.

PICTURE 8. DISCOLOURED VEGETATION



PICTURE 8: DISCOLOURED VEGETATION

Field Work.

The two pictures above show the withering of crops and discolouration of vegetation due to the degradation of the environment by crude oil spillage.

PICTURE 9. WHIRLING THICK FUMES



Field Work.

From the picture above, you can see thick fumes whirling up into the atmosphere; and it depicts the release of hydrocarbon into the air. This also accounts for the distrust the communities in the area have for these companies and their workers. Through fire which this paper considers as a great crucible, many people have lost their lives and properties. And the demand for compensation by the natives, have enriched some persons more than others (indigenes and company representatives) thereby leading to crisis, sometimes the crisis may deepen and the people are worse for it.

The presences of fumes in the air can cause poor visibility to drivers, cyclists and even pedestrians. The black soothe from the fumes can stain white clothes and float on water, hence making the water lose its aesthetic value and function. Water is a very important component of human body as water forms about one third (1/3) of adult weight or two third (2/3) of infant body weight; Green, 2000.

After a fire outbreak, the land's chemistry is altered as well as water content, living organisms and even the land quality is affected. You can observe caking of the soil, dead animals and swam of flies indicating the possible death and decomposition of soil microbial which make the fertility of land possible; the work of Amadi, (1990) shows the microbial effect on the soil. Observed also from the picture are that the trees in the bush have dried up and the grasses as well are gone, which implies that the economic basis of the people are altered negatively; and this can be a major source of internal conflict. There are recorded cases of inter and intra community conflicts leading to the death of many people, destruction of towns and villages; as in the cases of Odi, Gbaramatu in Bayelsa state and Umuechem in Rivers state to mention a few; a view supported by Emuedo (2014).

PICTURE 10. PHYSICAL OUTLOOK OF A VEGETATION AFTER FIRE OUTBREAK



Field Work.

From the foregoing therefore, this paper proposes that the more an environment is degraded or despoiled in the process of producing means of subsistence, the more the people suffer from numerous health problems. It also states that the more environmental protection education is carried out by the relevant authority, the better the people's health will be.

In order to be able to satisfy the curiosity of this writer as to how the economic activities going on in the zone have impacted the environment and health of the people, a tour of the zone was undertaken and that lead to the generation of some pictures that are contained herein; of which their presentation, interpretation and analysis would go a long way to explaining how degraded the environment and health of the people in this regime has been in recent time. Some persons were interviewed and literature perused; both contributed in enhancing the data for this work.

CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

PICTURE – Is the product of a photographer which is usually printed on paper for record purposes and it usually represents the real image, near real image of the object in question.

DESCRIPTION: - Simply, this is the objective narration and interpretation of the image conveyed or captured in this work.

DEGRADED- Is the past tense of degrade and it is the despoiling of the “mother” or habitat of a people from where they derive their means of survival or sustenance.

NIGER DELTA ENVIRONMENT- Is a delicate and fragile ecological zone in southern Nigeria which is criss crossed by rivers, seas and oceans and has abundance of crude oil and gas in its bowel and this accounts for its importance to Nigeria as a nation and the world at large.

COPING STRATEGY – Means several methods by which individuals or groups formulated though not written to survive in disarticulated economy and alienated environment; though these techniques or designs are not formal, rather escapist in outlook.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The people having realised the amount of and extent of damage on their environment and have reacted in several manners as to cope with the current realities in their environment not in the interest of all. Next to be discussed are resource control, regional militia and squatter settlements.

- The region on daily basis is losing its land, water and air to the hazards generated by the major economic activities of the nation (oil and its related products) and these varied hazards impacts on the people's health. This spurred the people and their governors to demand for a phenomenon known as "resource control". Resource control is a process whereby the people in the region are asking from the Federal Government for a larger proportion of fifty percent (50%) of the worth of the resources accruing from crude oil, rather than the current practice of thirteen percent (13%) derivation which has left the region and its people poorer, and more debilitated. In support of this view are Tamuno and Felix (2006); who state that "oil has brought little but misery to the people of the Niger Delta as the local people have become poorer and less healthy than other Nigerians in such ways as oil spills and pollution which have devastated and degraded the environment". Other means of ruining or wrecking the environment as postulated by World Bank, 1995 report and Mbendi Profile (2004) are through seismic activities, building of roads, canals and houses, gas flaring and pollution.

In the midst of environmental degradation and poor quality of health of the people are dangerous coping strategies which the people adopted for survival. Some of the fall out of the survival strategies are considered problematic, and the observed are; the formation of various forms of ethnic movements and militia in the zone aimed at defending the people and the zone from oppression and injustice. Some examples are; Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ikwerre Youth Council (IYC), Ijaw National Congress (INC), Egbesu, Bakassi and MASSOB.

The ethnic militia are the military arms of the ethnic movements. The militia have been responsible for the spate of kidnapping, militancy and even inter and intra communal conflicts and its attendant problems; whereby peace, security and life in the zone have been compromised. To add credence to this, are scholars like Naanen, (2000); Green Peace, (2001); and Kearney (2003) who argue that the safety and security of the people have been grossly endangered through the state and Multinational corporations' (MNCs) misuse of the military and arms, resulting in deaths, destruction of towns, fire out breaks and the growing spate of ethnic militia. The formation of such groups is what Schaefer, (2000) calls "Collective behaviour", and it is a characteristic of modern societies. You may recall that the people are losing identity culturally and otherwise.

The fact that safety and security are not guaranteed, the health of the inhabitants is seriously in doubt as no meaningful activity can go on in an atmosphere of insecurity, including fishing and farming which are veritable sources of food in the area. To give support to the issue is Igbo, (2001) who states that "Any activity of government that fails the test of enhancing the safety and security of its citizens is inimical to the principles of good governance. Not only have oil exploration and exploitation ruined the economic base (fishery and agriculture) of the Niger Delta, it has grossly endangered their safety and security in such a way that any future recovery becomes a matter of conjecture."

Worlu, (2005) states that “Oil accounts for more than 90% of Nigeria’s total revenue and it is also the main economic base of the nation, as such the oil industry is viewed as a source of viable and lucrative job provider.” This belief has a tremendous impact on the Urban-Rural pull and Urban-Urban pull phenomena; as people from all walks of life increasingly move into the zone to seek for jobs. The pull is responsible for the population pressure observed in the zone and its associated health problems; such as typhoid, cholera, malaria, tuberculosis which are said to be on the increase, SDCC (2001).

CONCLUSION

This paper has evidently shown beyond reasonable doubt that the Niger Delta environment is tremendously degraded and the observed degradation has both direct and indirect effect on the people. The people therefore, had taken certain steps and actions as they must survive in the face of harsh economic challenges and most of the actions may not be in the interest of all.

The national economic activities operational in the region have led to the disarticulation of the Niger Delta people’s economy and the alienation of the entire people from their traditional productive pattern or lifestyle, which means they are completely alienated from their means of subsistence.

It is a common sight to see gas flared into the air; trees hewed, seismic shootings and x-rays taking place in the area or zone. It is also of common sight to see oil spillage and pollution. All that impact on the people’s air, water and land. The combination of these three elements is what makes up a people’s environment. The environment has three important characteristics; first, it is protective, repository of waste and the storage house of man’s nutrition/nutrients; Giddens (1996). Therefore, any alteration on it leads to untold consequences and that is the typical case in the Niger Delta.

Since the Government and the multinational corporations have dealt carelessly on the environment which in turn has led to several observable challenges or problems without alternative options, therefore, most people have resorted to uncivilised methods in order to live, that is, keep body and soul together.

This contradiction between the means of production and treatment of the cancerous disease has left the zone under-developed and with several other unhealthy consequences, such as; bunkering, kidnapping, militancy and other fatalistic behavioural pattern for instance isolating pipe carrying crude and rip it open; an action which has contributed greatly to the cause of reported fire incidences in places like Jesse in 1998, Rukpokwu in 2004.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that given the state of degradation in the Niger Delta region, as the pictures have shown; the Government should take urgent steps to ensure that any form of economic activities in the Nation should be handled with extreme caution as international best practice should be employed.

The government should also endeavour to engage the services of environmentalists in order to carry out remediation services in the degraded environment. While the indigenes who are at the receiving end of all the degradation challenges should willfully engage in community environmental advocacy, thereby sensitising the youth and all those who may employ negative measures as means of survival strategies.

Furthermore, there should be introduction of environmental education in the curricula of education across the country. Next that the environmental protection laws of the country should be strictly enforced by government regulating and monitoring agencies. Finally that patriotism should be the watch word for all Nigerians.

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