

## The Psychosocial Perspectives of Environmental Transitions in the Niger Delta

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**Abstract:** The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria has undergone tremendous environmental transitions that might have been studied from the economic, social and political perspectives. What is seemingly lacking is a sustained analysis of the complete psychosocial perspectives of the transitions. Studying the transitions from the psychosocial perspectives becomes even more urgent now because the lives of those negatively affected by the transitions should matter more than other considerations. Disturbed ecologies trigger off a number of responses that can even put enormous stress on the gross domestic product and this in turn can affect the ease or otherwise with which a national government can deliver on its promises to the people. This study is therefore very important in terms of identifying the psychosocial support that communities in the Niger Delta would need if equity and social justice are to be pursued as principles deserving attention in national resource allocation. Using a qualitative design based partly on ethnographic portraits and content analysis, the study revealed that there has been gross neglect of the psychosocial perspectives on the way government and other agencies doing business in the region have tried to enforce redress in communities whose ecologies have been negatively impacted over the years. Based on the findings, a psychosocial framework has been proposed that could partly but significantly uplift the lives of the people of the Niger Delta Region.

**Key words:** Chaos, crisis, deprivations, degradations, diseases, poverty

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### INTRODUCTION

Occupying a geographical space of about 26,000 km<sup>2</sup> and consisting of the Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta and Edo States of Nigeria, the Niger Delta is clearly the third largest delta in the globe. Significantly rich in the flora and fauna, the Niger Delta produces almost 90 % of the crude oil Nigeria puts on the international market and it is almost clear that crude oil is the major pillar on which Nigeria's economy is based. Scholars in the literature have reported that the Niger Delta holds an oil reserve of about 25 billion barrels of oil and its gas reserve is estimated to be about 130 trillion cubic feet (Aiyetan, 2008; Oboreh, 2010)

In addition to oil, the Niger Delta is reputed to be the second largest producer of palm oil, next only to Malaysia. Rather than have these enormous natural endowment advance its progress and development for its community and people, the Niger Delta has been reputed to be a hot bed of environmental transitions leading to degradation that has negatively affected its climate and geographical resources related to its large deposits of mineral oil, fisheries, wildlife and tourism (Otite and Umukoro, 2011). So, what should have been working to its advantage has led to serious crisis of large proportions. The reality of the situation now is that the Niger Delta the mainstay of Nigeria's oil wealth is reportedly the most

economically marginalized, poverty-stricken and ecologically degraded region of the nation (Ojakorotu, 2008a, b; Rexler, 2010; Ross, 2003).

Environmental transitions, degradation and deprivation have been studied intensively from the perspective of political economy. Most of the studies have alluded to the destruction and truncation of the traditional means of livelihood for all people living in the Niger Delta Region. The socio-economic dislocation the region has generated profound crisis of large proportions such that there are reported cases of abductions and killings (Jike, 2004). Scholars in the literature have reported that everywhere there are common expressions and experiences of marginalization allegedly by both the Nigerians government and the oil prospecting companies in the region (Orobator *et al.*, 2005). In response to these experiences of expression of deprivation and loss of class, the Nigerian government has set up structures like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) established by dint of the Niger Delta Act (Orobator *et al.*, 2005) and the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (here in after, OMPADEC) both of which were meant to speed up the development of the Niger Delta Region together with the people inhabiting the oil producing area.

Structural provisions, then are very much in place but how much the people have benefitted remains doubtful.

So, the chaos continues together with the loss of lives and unleashing of terror on the poor and defenseless people of the Niger Delta

Whilst political responses to the crisis visited on the Niger Delta have been penned down on study, the reality of their achievements remains doubtful. Even at that assuming the structural arrangements have been perfected, researching information about the psychosocial perspectives of the environmental transitions going in the Niger Delta is copiously lacking or even much diminished. This is why this study is very much relevant. For the psychosocial pains unleashed on the people of the Niger Delta needs to be mitigated. It is suggested here that then and only then can anyone justifiably talk about the introduction and upholding of the principles of equity, fairness and social justice that are globally acknowledged as the bedrocks of peace and unity.

**Research objectives:** Based on the background statement this study seeks to achieve objectives listed as follows:

- Investigation of the environmental transitions in the Niger Delta Region
- Identification of the environmental degradation and deprivation
- Quantification the environmental interventions by government
- Proposition of the psychosocial framework that could help in mitigating the challenges of the environmental transitions in the region
- Proposition of new directions for relevant research that might better serve the needs of reversing any negative psychosocial impacts that the communities have experienced or may be experiencing now

By achieving these objectives it is hoped that this study would contribute significantly, to the pool of knowledge on the subject and more importantly, addressing the psychosocial dimensions of the environmental transition issues connected with the crisis the region is experiencing almost endlessly.

**Research questions:**

- What is the nature of the environmental transition occurring in the Niger Delta Region
- In what areas are there environmental degradation and deprivation impacting the people's lives much more seriously
- To what extent are the environmental intervention strategies by the government incorporating psychosocial support systems

- What could be the psychosocial framework that would be relevant for mitigating the challenges posed by environmental transitions, degradations and deprivations
- What should be the research direction in mitigating the challenges of environmental transitions

**Theoretical framework:** This study is guided by two theories, namely: the Bronfenbrenner's system and socio cultural theories. The Bronfenbrenner's system theory explains the interactions between systems which make up the community and how the interaction between the different systems can shape the lives of people and families.

**The Bronfenbrenner's systems theory:** This theory places emphasis on the view that the effect of such interactions can either be positive or negative depending on the context (John, 2013). This implies that the social system as influenced by the interactions within the systems impact on human development and growth. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) the individual development occurs through a complex process of two way interaction between the developing person and the environment. The effect on the individual occurs even if the person is not aware of it. Enculturation in a specific environment starts from the child's home, classroom neighborhood and this connects with outward and societal institution. The back and forth interaction between a child and the parents influence the child and the parents in different ways.

**Socio cultural theory:** According to Papalia *et al.* (2003), the socio-cultural theory, propounded by Vygotsky, states that the cognitive growth of an individual involves some form of collaboration between the individual and the environment. Through these interactions, life skills are acquired by individuals and this in many instances will later determine their ways of life. The learning which occurs is through social interaction shared activities. This helps children to internalize their society's ways of thinking, norms and behaving until they are able to make those ways their own (Papalia *et al.*, 2003).

The role of the adult in organizing and helping, the internalization process of the child's knowledge was emphasized. This implies that whenever and wherever there environmental transitions are noticed in the Niger Delta, the effects on the people's collaboration and interactions processes are most likely distorted. In situations where adequate substitute has not been put in place to facilitate a healthy interaction, children acquire the skills for survival from interactions and this can result in chaos, insecurity and violent which is the present case with the Niger Delta.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study follows a qualitative design using ethnographic portraits occurring within the environmental transition events in the Niger Delta Region. The researcher here sheds more light on the design and methods followed in deriving the data that informed the results and discussions, conclusion and recommendations.

**Research design:** The nature of this study demands that the researcher adopts the interpretivist research paradigm which places emphasis on experience and interpretation. This means that the researcher was basically interested in the kind of interpretation that is influenced by the practical environmental transition events and how the communities interacted with them in the existing social contexts within which they occurred.

The interpretivist focus of the study demanded that the researcher should engage existing knowledge systems in which key players in the communities become one of the main sources of the discourses reflected in this study. Within this focus, the researcher contextualized and analyzed available texts, especially, policies and relevant documents to look for specific ways in which the people made meaning of the environmental transitions that have occurred in the Niger Delta Region. What this means is that this study was based on an interpretivist epistemology which requires that social reality be seen as a set of meanings that are usually constructed by individuals who participate in specific realities as was the case in this geographical location (Gall *et al.*, 2006).

The interpretivist paradigm guided basically the ethnographic portraits that were applied in the case studies of naturally occurring events in the Niger Delta environments. The researcher used the ethnographic technique because the primary method of investigating the environmental transition events was in-depth, field-based study of particular instances of phenomena (Gall *et al.*, 2006). The ethnographic portraits were particularly useful because the study partly involved participant observation in which the researcher immersed herself selected communities in the Bayelsa and Delta states in the Niger Delta. During this immersion, the researcher was partly involved in community organization whilst at the same time recording actions, interactions or events that occurred. That was the way in which the researcher secured access and gained observational access to the insiders making the meanings studied.

**Research methods:** The researcher chose the qualitative research design because the data gathered had to be

qualitative. This is particularly so because the respondents needed to express themselves in an open-ended way and demonstrate their actions (Henning *et al.*, 2004). The researcher sought to understand the social world of the respondents and derive from this process correct interpretations and understanding of the phenomena studied. In this way, therefore, this study has used the socio-semiotic ethnography which was built around discourses, texts and experiences, social, historical and geo-political circumstances (Vannini, 2009).

Thus the method applied in this study involved a combination of semi-structured, open-ended interviews, unstructured conversations that were held on and off sites as well as the analyses of texts and artifacts and participant and site observations (Vannini, 2009).

The first phase of the study involved making inventories of past, present and possibly future events. This was done through the application of narratives, photo-stories, observations and interviews with participants.

The second phase involved the exploration of the environmental degradation experiences of key participants. The idea here was to find out how semiotic resources or events have been used to express truths (Vannini, 2009).

**Target population and sampling:** The target population was all the communities in the Niger Delta. However, purposive sampling was adopted and this involved the selection of information-rich cases for the in-depth studies. From such studies one can learn a lot about the issues that are of vital importance in this study.

According to Creswell (2014), purposive sampling in this case must be used to select the participants who will best answer the research questions. Therefore, primary key participants in the communities had to be interviewed over a period of one year.

Ten sites were selected in the Bayelsa and Delta States on the basis of five sites per state. Individuals in the ten sites were observed and one key player per site were visited at home and interviewed based purely on a voluntary basis.

**Sources of data:** Data were gathered from observations of communities, observations of altered environments, economic activities, community improvement efforts of the oil-prospecting companies, interactions with key players in the sites selected, interviews, observational notes, transcripts, document analysis of primary and secondary sources and artifacts.

**Data analysis:** Data was analyzed by means of descriptive or interpretative approaches (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Attempt was made to fuse and structure mass meaning of data in order to establish general statements about the relationships among the categories of data along the lines suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006). From this point, the researcher tried to understand the data and to formulate in condensed form what the participants in this study really mean and understand. This analysis was stepped up by engaging in a literature control based on interrogating primary and secondary sources of written documents (mainly policies) in this case. So, the researcher engaged in inductive category coding and simultaneous comparison of units of meaning across categories (Henning *et al.*, 2004).

**Trustworthiness:** Trustworthiness in this study was based on Guba and Lincoln (2005) Model (Morse and Field, 1995). The model involves four criteria, namely: truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Of course, the principles of logic and justification guided the analysis of documents and interactions.

Ethical measures were ensured in order to protect the rights and identity of participant's information, confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, benefits, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at the stage of this study were enforced very strictly throughout.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prominent in the discourses occurring in the field of study are the environmental transitions, degradation and deprivations seriously impacting the lives of the people living in the Niger Delta of Nigeria and then the nature of intervention strategies, so far applied by the Federal Government. In particular, the researcher sought to understand the extent to which the intervention strategies might have incorporated psychosocial support systems. Based on the adequacy or otherwise of the psychosocial support systems put in place, a framework is suggested that can enhance the mitigation of the challenges faced by the Niger Delta communities. It might be that the study alone cannot offer all the possible solutions to the challenges faced by the communities and it would therefore make much sense to suggest future directions. The results are presented as follows.

**The nature of the environmental transitions:** The region had been remarkably rich in flora and fauna. The people had been active in farming and fishing and the region had been the major producer of palm products, rubber and

timber. Subsistence farming in cassava and water yams and fish farming were commonplace. All of these ecological activities have been visibly altered and neglected with the coming of oil exploration that began with the extraction of oil from the Olobiri oil wells by the Shell D'Arcy (now Shell British Petroleum Development Company) in 1956.

With the exploration of oil, Nigeria's economy became monoculture, more or less in the due course as the nation became more and more entirely reliant on the exportation of crude oil as the mainstay of the economy. In 1958, Nigeria's oil production level was just 6,000 barrels per day through the combined production of the Shell, Mobil, Elf, Aquitaine, Chevron and Agip but this was to increase rapidly to two million barrels per as time went by Ibeanu (2000). In time, the Niger Delta ecology was adversely affected as pipelines carrying crude oil burst or began to be criminally and deliberately tampered with and damaging leakages became rather common.

With high-pressure pipelines carrying oil crude oil, diesel and gas criss-crossing the region and leakages becoming rampant, the Niger Delta wildlife, farmlands, forests, aquatic and human lives were destroyed and sometimes with impunity. For example, fire incidents were reported at Egborode in the Delta State (Ola and Eighemheberio, 1998) Jesse also, in the Delta State (The Guardian) and Onicha-Amiyi Uhu in Abia State in 2003.

Ojajorotu and Okeke-Uzodike (nd) have made the point that the Niger Delta ecology has been negatively affected equally well by toxic discharges from refining activities into the fresh water sources and farmlands.

The ecology has been impacted negatively by constantly flaring natural gas that is not being refined and utilized for purposes of safe and clean energy sources and this has led to the raising of the environmental temperature and thereby destroying wildlife and even human lives (Ojajorotu and Okeke-Uzodike, 2006).

**Environmental degradation and deprivation:** Scientifically and technically, the Niger Delta Region has been and is still being degraded as pointed out by the ethnographic reports in the discussion above. A part from the negative alteration of the ecology it has been reported that poorly constructed canals and causeways for the purpose of mining activities by oil producing companies have negatively affected the region's hydrology with the end result of flooding in some areas and contaminated or inadequate supply of fresh and safe water in others (Ojajorotu and Okeke-Uzodike, 2006).

The artificial canals constructed by the companies reportedly carry saline water into sources of freshwater

and that this frequently terminates plant and animal lives (Ojaborotu and Okeke-Uzodike, 2006). It stands to good reasoning that where animal and plant lives are so, insecure, the communities could become rather restive and this creates a psychological concern of grave proportions.

**Present intervention strategies by government:** Idemudia (2009a, b) and Eboime and Omotor (2010) have studied the poverty alleviation efforts of the Government and the oil companies. Researchers seem to be concluding that in spite of all the poverty targeting strategies, the Niger Delta has remained one of the poorest regions in Nigeria.

The literature has listed some of the technical and legal intervention strategies that included a number of acts. For example, these acts have been enacted: the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESRFEA) Act, harmful waste (special criminal provisions); Act that prohibits dumping of harmful wastes on the air, land or water; Hydrocarbon Oil Refineries Act; Associated Gas Re-injection Act the Endangered Species Act; Sea Fisheries Act; Oil Pipelines Act; Territorial Waters Act; Petroleum Products and Distribution (Management Board) Act; Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection Act; Nigerian Mining Corporation Act; Quarantine Act; River Basins Development Authority Act; Factories Act and Water Resources Act. In spite of the existence of these legal and technical structures, the point has been made repeatedly in the literature that if these structures actually work and the legal requirements enforced rigidly the environmental degradation streaks visited on the region would have been avoided considerably.

Rather than enforce these acts, the government has been reported to wittingly or unwittingly embraced acts amounting to what scholars have termed gross human rights violation in the region (Ojaborotu, 2011; Zalik, 2004; Crow, 1995; Pegg, 1999) The first most visible militarization of the region was located in the 1990 event at Umuechem. This event manifested itself when the Shell Oil Company manager requested for the deployment of a detachment of mobile police to protect the company's facilities from the protest by the local people against the hardships visited upon them by reckless oil exploration activities. This deployment caused the loss of about 80 lives and the destruction of about 100 homes (Isike *et al.*, 2007). Then in 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa and other prominent Ogoni leaders in the Rivers State were arrested, detained without criminal charges and the 1999 brutal annihilation of the Odi community in Bayelsa State under the democratic rule of former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Isike *et al.*, 2007). Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight

other prominent Ijaw Chiefs were executed in November 1995 and the die was then cast for more brutal violence in the region.

These and more military "Punishment" and wanton abuse of human rights in the region might have caused enormous psychosocial trauma that remain largely unaddressed in the literature that is available on the subject. This is where this study becomes very vital at this stage.

**Proposed psychosocial framework for closing the gaps in the mitigation processes:** The psychosocial connotation of the environmental transitions of the region is not only to be indicated in environmental degradation. Rather the connotation comes out very clear in the perceptions held by the oil-rich communities that they have been grossly, persistently and unduly cheated, neglected, marginalized and alienated in the resource sharing of the proceeds from the oil exploration (Obi). The communities easily but correctly point to the reality of lack or inadequate provision of health care facilities, poor infrastructures, unemployment, endangered livelihood and even death (Ojaborotu, 2006, 2011; Ojaborotu and Okeke-Uzodike 2006; Walker 2008).

The discourse featured in the available written documents would suggest that oil has not been a blessing to communities in the region. The catastrophe indicated thus far in the discourse confirm the suspicion that the region fits properly into the resource-curse theory as propounded by Auty (1993), Ross (1999), Sach and Warner (2001) and Idemudia (2009a, b).

The irony of the efforts being made to try and resolve the crisis in the region is that the psychosocial dimension has been neglected. For example, the Niger Delta Development master plan did not include any substantial elements of the psychosocial approach to resolving the crisis. As Rexler (2010) and Idemudia (2009a, b) put it most attempts made to effectively address the environmental crisis in the region have failed abysmally and tragically.

There is profound distrust among the people in the Niger Delta that only lip service has been paid to the various attempts government and the oil companies have made to help them. Indeed, scholars frequently hold the view that distrust is the root of the Niger Delta crisis (Adekoye, 2006; Akpan, 2006; Frynas, 2005).

From the point of view of psychology, the Frustration-aggression theory which argues that frustration increases the likelihood of aggression holds true in this case (Ojaborotu, 2006). However, this Frustration-aggression theory is often buttressed by the theory of marginalization.

The theory of marginalization is equally useful in this discourse. Scholars in the relevant literature have defined marginalization as a complex process that involves the relegating of specific groups of people to the lower or outer rungs of society. When they are so relegated they are effectively pushed to the fringes of society and this occurs economically, politically, culturally and socially and the practice is normally the consequence of the social policy of exclusion (Prince and Hadwin, 2013; Schleicher, 2014; Sercombe and Donnelly, 2013). So, then, the theory of marginalization states that certain segments of society are marginalized when they are copiously and deliberately or inadvertently denied equal access to productive resources and avenues for realizing their productive human potential and then the opportunities for utilizing their full capacities (MacLeod, 2012; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). When this happens, the marginalized groups are most likely to experience and wallow in poverty, misery, unemployment, low wages if and when employed, lack of or inadequate shelter, insecurity and discrimination of all sorts (Sociology guide, Watts *et al.* Department of Education; Hansen, 2012).

The theory of marginalisation which was first conceptualized by Park (1928) describes the experience of migration and conflicts which result from the inevitable contact between cultures. Park (1928) explains the cross-pressures immigrants experienced as a result of overlapping involvement in different cultures. The result of such cross-pressure is lack of integration leading to the status of an outsider when dominant cultures are involved. Adding to the research by Park, Stonequist, codified marginalisation as the experience of double consciousness which may be translated emotionally in the form of moodiness, ambiguity, a contradictory look and extreme sensitivity. The understanding of marginalisation goes beyond just ethnically mixed groups. This includes cases in which a marginal situation result when there are inconsistencies between one's status and one's social role (Lewin, 1948; Hughes, 1945; Colquhoun, 2004). From this initial theorization, a lot has been done to improve on the understanding of marginalisation (Billson, 2005). Quite recently, marginalisation is understood in three dimensions) as cultural marginalisation which refers to the dilemmas of cross-cultural identities and assimilation, as social role marginalisation which describes the tensions which occur when an individual is restricted from belonging to a positive reference group and as structural marginalisation which refers to political, social and economic powerlessness and disadvantage. The latter is maintained by a number of social dynamics such as oppression and discrimination (Billson, 2005; Bernt and Colini, 2013).

Equally of great importance in this study is the theory of dissent and repression. The view being held here is that when the Niger Delta people express dissent and they are repressed by government should normally, follow from such repression from the point of view of psychology could be traumatization and withdrawal. This further has the propensity of making the people to even resort to violence of some sort as is common with the vandalisation of oil and gas pipelines criss-crossing the region and this reportedly often lead to more deaths and further environmental degradation. Scholars are of the view that when the people express dissent, the Federal Government of Nigeria has repeatedly demonstrated proclivity towards more repression that is unconventional (Omotola, 2009; Oborokumo, 2003; Ikelegbe, 2001). And then, of course, it is common knowledge that all the above theories are mitigated by what is known as the family theory.

**Family system theory:** The family system theory is based on the premise that we are all born into a family even though people often think they are really autonomous individuals who are capable of free and independent choice (Bitter and Corey, 2009). For us Africans, we believe that there is very much limited autonomy and the right to make independent choice to large extent. Africans generally regard the family as a very closely knit unit within which one grows, develop and change under the very close scrutiny of the family that is quick to impose sanctions whenever one deviates from the expected norm and this kind of regulate the behaviors of members of the family, especially, the young ones. In the context of this discourse it is proper to suggest that the effect of trauma caused by environmental transitions in the Niger Delta can easily develop into a family matter and concern as the people believe very strongly that whatever affects any member of the family affects all. To that extent, support for each other is paramount in the event of a frontal attack on the communities as was experienced at Oodi in Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

Family system theory has many applications to families and other social systems that constitute the situation in the Niger Delta (Haefner, 2014). The family system theory which is belief to emerge from General Systems Theory speaks to the work of Bowen at Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas (1946-1954). Through observation of relationship patterns of families, Bowen developed the family theory. Bowen's theory consists of a system of eight interlocking states that describe the inevitable chronic emotional anxiety present in family relationships and concludes that chronic anxiety is the source of family dysfunction (Haefner, 2014). The key

concept of this theory is differentiation of self and emotional fusion which refers to the ability of a person to distinguish him/herself from the family of origin on a personal and intellectual level (Bowen, 1978). Bowen is of the opinion that the driving forces underlying all human actions comes from the drive and pull between family members striving for a balance between distance and togetherness (Wylie, 1990). Nurses working with families adhere to Bowen's assumption that the emotional health of the individual, especially children and adolescents, cannot be separated from the family.

**Future research directions:** This study has revealed very significant qualitative data reflecting the environmental transitions in the region. It is envisaged that the results here would be enhanced by applying qualitative designs in determining the overall economic effects of the said environmental transitions.

It would be valuable to explore in more details the spin-off effects of the transitions on environmental intelligence of communities. A cross-community analysis of the impacts of the transitions would be valuable at the same time. Research would be needed that explain the behavior of people in the devastated communities. For example, would the trauma experienced in the region affect women more than men? What could be the gender and/or age differentials in the experiences of trauma in the region? These and many more questions from the point of view of psychology may help us to have deeper and clearer understanding of the catastrophe in the region.

## CONCLUSION

The environmental transitions impacts of oil explorations in the Niger Delta have been visible in the literature over the time. Debates been quite illuminating and actually interrogate the effectiveness of the various community improvements policies so far designed and implemented in the region. The Environmental Rights Actions/Friends of the Earth and Oilwatch Nigeria (2012) has proposed a strategy for making policies work in the region. However, the psychosocial approaches to dealing with the challenges encountered in the region remain extremely weak.

The point must be made that fiscal policies alone may not profoundly resolve the psychological trauma the Niger Delta communities suffer. Government, oil companies and other agencies may make available roads, bridges, canals, schools, health centers and so, on. The truth remains that a bruised psyche may not fully

appreciate whatever paltry efforts that are being made to assuage the impacts of environmental degradation. And this is where paying attention to the formulation of an effective psychosocial framework for assisting the people become very crucial.

The psychosocial framework proposed here is meant to draw ideas from all stakeholders involved in the crisis the people of the Niger Delta been subjected to. From the perspective of psychosocial framework, the experiences of poverty, unemployment, sicknesses, hopelessness, bereavement and marginalization can be excruciating.

Based on the considerations emanating from the findings, the proposed psychosocial framework interrogates psychosocial solutions embedded in individual and group therapies that might work best for the people. Although, the framework proposed may provide veritable solutions to the trauma experienced by the people it is clear that it might work best if used in conjunction with the fiscal structures that are other stakeholders have been experimenting with. For example, the psychosocial framework should seek to embrace the services made available in health centers and schools as much as possible.

It could be that instances may occur when the traumatized people might need referral services. This is where the psychosocial framework must incorporate educational, medical and social support systems in the communities.

Apart from embracing a psychosocial strategy in attempts made to resolve the crisis faced by the people it is even becoming clearer every day that research, so far, done in the region has not sufficiently covered other relevant aspects of the experience. The gaps occurring in research would need to be closed.

It is proposed that research on the impacts of environmental transitions and degradation now needs to be more tilted in the directions of longitudinal and trend studies. Beyond this expectation, qualitative studies could become even more far reaching than quantitative studies alone. Qualitative studies conducted over a period of three or more years would reveal the deep feelings of traumatized communities like the Odi community in Bayelsa State could be very valuable. Whilst quantitative designs may yield solid data describing degradations occurring in the region, qualitative designs may shed more intricate light on the deep feelings of those who have lost dear ones in the regional crises. The people's voices need to be heard more clearly. This is what might help us in coming up with solutions that have much more long lasting effects.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcomes of this study it is suggested as follows: the current downturn in oil revenues should suggest to the government that the time has now come to consider paying more serious attention to the revival of the communities' geo-economic activities in farming and fishing. Creating more employment opportunities for the youth in the region can help curb the reported rising incidents of kidnapping in the region.

The oil-related industry remains far too weak and seemingly neglected to be of any immediate value. Thus, it is critical for oil companies, government and parastatals to consider designing and implementing long-lasting effective industrial and entrepreneurial development activities in the region. So far, the Nigerian Oil and Gas industry Local Content Development Act designed to provide local employment in the oil industry remains ineffectual (Rexler, 2010). At the moment no single psychological wellness and care centers have been established anywhere in the region that can handle issues related to gross trauma and stress. It is not enough to ask the people to go the nearby hospitals for help when it is clear that such facilities have not been well equipped to cope with psychosocial stress. In fact, the few existing hospitals do not have significant numbers, if anything at all of trained and competent psychological care experts and so, they do not add much value to resolving the issues highlighted in this study. This is why the few medical colleges should be urgently assisted to embark on the training of psychologists and related wellness technicians over a period of time. For a start there might be need to pilot-test and then launch out to a wider scale. To neglect the psychosocial health of the communities is to inadvertently plan for a much painful calamity in the future and this needs to be avoided at all costs.

This study could not have provided all the major significant solutions to the impacts of environmental transitions on the people of the Niger Delta. Even at that the psychosocial perspective of the challenge faced by the communities could turn out to be most valuable and welcoming in the debates on the subject at this point in time.

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