

Environmental Education and Issues in Oil Exploration-A Case Study of Oguta L.G.A. of Imo State

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Abstract: Issues in oil exploration, the writer attempts to increase public awareness on the relationship between environment and development and involve all concerned in an effort to check pollution caused by oil exploration. In order to make a good Research, few hypotheses were formulated. Gas flaring has undoubtedly played a role in the degradation of the environment. Plants and animals do not benefit from oil exploration due to spills and there is loss soil nutrients, diminution of cultivable lands and low economic development despite oil exploration. The sample area consists of those Communities in Oguta Local Government Area where major oil activities take place. These are Oguta urban, Ezi-orsu and Izombe. The data are collected through the use of Questionnaire and such are analyzed using frequencies and percentages. From the data analysis, findings were made and conclusions drawn.

Key words: Environment education, oil exploration, plants and animals, communities, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, man has lived in harmony with the environment and respecting the ecological laws of nature. The earth in turn offers man protection, survival and hope, but with the scientific and technological breakthrough, which followed the advances in knowledge, man began to conquer his environment. Man invaded seas once believed to be inexhaustible and even reached out to the remotest part of the earth. The impenetrable tropical rainforest jungles for example bowed before him.

As technology and increased knowledge fell into man's hand, great arsenals for the exploitation of the natural resources and the eventual transformation of some into useful products, the natural laws of conserving the ecology became increasingly transgressed. Thus blinded by the greed on one hand and compelled by population pressure on another, man began to exploit the environment beyond its carrying capacity.

What followed has been increase incidents of erosion, desertification, degradation of agricultural lands, pollution of air, land, rivers, seas and oceans.

The relationship between environment, education and oil exploration in our society cannot be over-emphasize. Environmental education also entails practice in decision-making and self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality. It enlightens the members of the society about their immediate environment, a globe, Eco-system, climatic

condition, contaminating agents, natural resources of sustainability, preservation of the seas, forest etc and maintaining a balanced environment based on the principle of stability, conservation, recycling the concept of global inter-dependence and the need to preserve the environment for all future generation.

For the hazards of oil exploration, they are man-made problems, which exist today mainly as a result of the careless indifference of the oil companies. Environmental Education postulates the way to control the environmental pollution caused by oil exploration. That is why Kaiama's declaration 1998 noted specially that:

"The unbating damage done to our fragile natural environment and to the health of our people is due in the main to uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas, which has led to numerous oil spillages, uncontrolled Gas flaring"....

Despite assurances to the contrary, serious attention has not been given to the problem of oil spillages and Gas flaring as a result of not teaching the people on how to cope with environmental hazards.

Many Geographers, Environmental scientist and Educationists have taken time to study environmental problems in many oil communities in Nigeria and have suggested solution to the problems, non has made any effort to study that of oil exploration in Oguta L.G.A. They do not realize that both Oguta and other oil communities have the same environmental problems and so should be expected to suffer the same geological and ecological disturbances.

In this study, the write intends to identify that the problem of saving the environment of Oguta L.G.A. From pollution and degradation is a serious one and therefore, needs great attention of both the Government and the resident oil companies, as this will investigate and ascertain the true position of the factors that cause environmental problems in oil exploration and how far these have affected the socio-economic status and the lives of the inhabitants.

For effective investigation of this study, the following hypotheses are postulated:

- Gas flaring has not undoubtedly played a role in the degradation of the environment.
- There isn't low economic development in the areas of Oguta L.G.A. despite oil exploration.
- Terrestrial and aquatic lives do not benefit from oil exploration due to spills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The area is Oguta L.G.A. of Imo State, which is one of 27 L.G.A.'s in the State. It was created out from the pre-existing Ohaji/Egbema/Oguta L.G.A. lies between Lat. 5.30 Degrees and 5.45 Degrees North And Longitude 6.45 Degrees and 6.50 Degrees East of the Greenwich Meridian. Remarkable features in Oguta L.G.A. are Lake, which divides Oguta into 11 and the flood plains of the Urashi River where most of the oil exploration takes place. Some of the communities include Egbuoma, Egwe, Awa, Akabor, Agwa, Izombe, Ejemekuru, Orsu-Obodo, Ezi-orsu, Nkwesi, Nebukwu etc. Under Geology, the areas lies within the quaternary period and coastal plain sands, which is part of the Niger Delta plain sands.

According to Nwadiaro (1986), "Human activity and development, whether social, economic, industrial or sometimes cultural, must go in one or all the components of the environment. These components categorized into air, land and water are tied to each other in a cycle. The physical, chemical and biological features in the Nigeria's lower Niger Delta, pose a Herculean tasks to environmentalists who must acquire broad and multidisciplinary expertise to face the challenges.

Education and environment: The issue of environmental Education has become a wide one as the world is almost flustered with a degraded ecosystem. It has become obvious that ignorance to consequence of the weight, which Human activities bear on the environment, could be the undoing of the future generation.

The Stockholm Conference on the Human environment mandated the organization of the United

Nation System, especially UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Scientific Cultural Organization) to step out and establish an International programme in Environmental Education (IEED). Shortly after this, the Belgrade Charter on the global framework for Environmental Education was signed in 1975. The charter summarized the objectives of Environmental Education as "a means to help individuals and social groups acquire awareness of response to the total environment and allied problems".

With the tempo thus excited, issues on Environmental Education reverberated again at the world international conference held in Tbilisi in former USSR in 1997. There it was said that "the goal of Environmental Education as adopted by the conference is to develop a citizenry that is aware of and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems, which has the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, commitments and skills to work individually and collectively towards solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones".

Obodo (1999) in his study summarized the guidelines for development of non-formal Environmental Education. He suggested the use of TV, radio etc to sensitize the General public to environmental issues, raise the level of environmental ethics while providing some entertainment.

Oluwande (1997) defined pollution as "the contamination of Human and Animal environment through discharge of sewage and other organic substance by industries and man".

Robinson (1978) noted that man has modified and destroyed the natural ecosystem in many ways, one of which is the spillage of liquid materials for instance oil on the oil on the land resources, such as crops, forest resources, water and air.

Odu (1981) contends that the various activities of oil industries have some effects on the environment including destruction of vegetation, continuous presence of light, heat, noise and in some cases soothing emission from flares, oil pollution of the environment through the accidental blow out of oil pipelines, leaks etc.

Newswatch magazine (1988) agreed that the many towns and villages in the country have suffered adversely from all forms of pollution, which resulted to a variety of water borne diseases and such pollution affects crops.

Anidegbe (1992) said, "Oil-bearing areas are becoming very sensitive about environmental calamities that they are exposed to such as the incidence of acid rain and depreciation in quality of aquatic and marine life. In addition, the spillage affected the socio-economic lives of the people such as loss of farmlands, cash crops, economic tress, fishing grounds and homes.

Having reviewed other people's ideas on oil exploration and its impact in degrading the environment, one can say that apart from oil spillage, there are damages inflicted on the oil producing areas. A number of farmlands have disappeared because of erosion resulting from drilling of oil from the oil bowels.

Nwabuze, Director of GACK, summarized by noting that the most objectionable of the afflictions suffered by the people of Niger Delta is environmental degradation coupled with feelings of mistrust and collaboration between the Nigerian State and the oil companies in degrading the environment.

RESULTS

The hypotheses posed earlier in this study have to be analysed based on the responses of the respondents in the questionnaire.

Hypothesis I: Gas flaring has undoubtedly not played any role in the degradation of the environment.

The responses indicated that 67% of the 100 Questionnaires distributed believed that most of the health and environmental problems encountered in the study area due to gas being flared by the companies, while 33% responded negatively (Table 1).

Hypothesis II: Terrestrial and aquatic lives do not benefit from oil exploration due to spills.

Table 2 indicates that out of the 100 Questionnaires distributed, 55% of the subjects responded positively. Since the inception of oil exploration in Oguta L.G.A., there has been a decrease in the vegetal cover of the area and that most animals especially the wild ones have disappeared due to consistent noise and bush clearings. It is also observed that the absence of most aquatic lives is as a result of spills in the rivers and lake.

Table 1: How gas flaring degrades the environment

| Alternatives | Responses | (%) |
|--------------|-----------|-----|
| Yes | 67 | 67 |
| No | 33 | 33 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 2: Plants and Animals lives in relation to oil exploration

| Alternatives | Responses | (%) |
|--------------|-----------|-----|
| Yes | 55 | 55 |
| No | 45 | 45 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 3: Socio-economic development and oil exploration

| Alternatives | Responses | (%) |
|--------------|-----------|-----|
| Yes | 52 | 52 |
| No | 48 | 48 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Hypothesis III: The socio-economic development is not low despite the oil exploration.

Table 3 shows that though there is provision of social amenities in Oguta L.G.A. They are not properly maintained as they are supposed to be in oil producing areas. Fifty two percent of the subjects responded positively while 48% responded negatively.

DISCUSSION

The crisis, which have bedeviled the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta, have almost obscured some all-pervasive problems, which are likely to become major issues militating against future development in the area. Environmental problems have become so overwhelming in the area that the Federal Government Agencies, State Governments and major oil companies, operating in the area appear to be reluctant to face up the task of dealing with them.

The quality of life in the oil producing areas has deteriorated and almost destroyed, especially in the Marine Communities by the unhealthy and virulent increase in pollution caused by the oil industry. The findings and discussion are based on the hypotheses stated earlier.

From the tables, it is discovered that the greater percentage of the people of Oguta L.G.A. responded positively that gas flaring is associated with different problems like health, settlement, pollution etc. The population is sparse due to the emission of dangerous gases like carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, methane and other hydrocarbons in the atmosphere. The smoke from these gases cause atmospheric pollution, deplete the Ozone layer, corrodes Iron materials etc. The use of polluted and acidified water causes skin babies, eye cataracts an even miscarriages.

Oil spillage has led to the reduction in the biomass and diversity of the main fauna and flora of the area. It is discovered that most of the rivers and swamps in the area have been totally condemned for use as result of constant spills, which blankets the surface thereby choking fishes and other aquatic lives to death.

The once evergreen and tropical rainforest has witnessed great massacre from clearings, cuttings, diggings and other exploitative activities by oil companies and these have given rise to derived Savanna in the tropical rainforest region.

The land is now prone to landslides, erosion, floods etc. This is why Odu (1981) in his research lamented that various activities of oil industries have some effects on the environment such as destruction of vegetation, continuous presence of light, heat, noise from flares, oil pollution through accidental blow out of oil pipelines, leaks etc.

Many traditional customs and habits in Oguta L.G.A. have been rendered impotent because of the high oil waste in the water upon which they depend on. Such customs include occupations like fishing, farming, children's games, the ceremonies of older age groups, river god's worships, riverside bathing especially for the women folk. The noisy machinery employed in oil exploration coupled with external fire resulting from the burning of gas which illuminates the forests day and night scare animals and they relocate.

In the area of the socio-economic development of Oguta L.G.A., the oil companies in Oguta are not making any impact in the development of the area. They have neither built new schools nor renovated the existing ones. In the areas of employment and job opportunities, the people are not treated fairly as they supposed to. Majorities of the semi-skilled workers who are the indigenes are employed as gatemen, cleaners and drivers or in other menial jobs that are available.

In the area of social amenities, they are not adequate. While some communities have water, electricity, schools, hospitals etc, others do not have and those provided are not maintained.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, it is evident that with Environmental Education to the indigenes of Oguta L.G.A., the people will have adequate knowledge of their surroundings and be better equipped to handle their problems. The oil companies and the people will be able to manage, preserve and conserve the environment

properly because a proper management of the environment is the catalyst needed for the take-off of development in any nation, State and Community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The oil companies in Oguta should minimize the burning/flaring of natural gas and device alternative use of the flared gas for industrial and domestic purposes. The Government should embark on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) programme to check the exploitative tendencies of the oil companies. This will help to monitor them and curtail spills and excessive flaring and excessive degradation of the rainforest.

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