

International Journal of Governance and Development Studies (IJOGDES), Vol 11, No. 1, pp. 62-77, 2024
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ISSN 2971-6691, e-ISSN 2971-6705

Arms Proliferation, Crude Oil Theft and Environmental Security in Africa: Lessons from Nigeria's Post-Amnesty Niger Delta

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Abstract

This paper examines the activities of third parties aided by Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation as a risk for environmental security in the Niger Delta region in the post-amnesty era. Basically, the study examines the extent to which the activities of third parties aided by the pervasiveness of SALW engender environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta. Its major argument is that, the activities of the third parties (Oil bunkers, pipeline vandals) aided by the proliferation of SALW is responsible for the majority of incidences of oil spillage in the region in the post-amnesty era. With the aid of in-depth interviews and secondary materials, the study revealed that the increase in pipeline vandalism and oil theft aided by the use of SALW were responsible for about 78.62% of incidences of oil spillage in the post amnesty era. The study concluded that environmental degradation in the post amnesty Niger Delta is mainly caused by the activities of third parties such as pipeline vandals and oil thieves. Hence, the Oil MNCs and the Federal government and Oil MNCs must strengthen surveillance security system to address worsening environmental crisis in the region.

Keywords: Environmental Security, Crude Oil Theft, Arms Proliferation, Oil Spillage, Niger Delta

1. Introduction

Environmental security is a generic concept in security studies which connote different things to scholars depending on the context and its usage. In this context, environmental security refers to the protection of people from the immediate and long-term man-made and natural vulnerabilities and the deterioration of the natural environment (UNDP, 1994). Hence, this paper examines the magnitude of the activities of third parties (Oil Thieves and Pipeline Vandals) on environmental security in the post amnesty Niger Delta. This is against the background of the numerous efforts undertaken by the Nigerian Government and Oil Multi-nationals to ameliorate environmental degradation in the region. Before the discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri in the present Bayelsa state in 1956, farming and fishing was the mainstay of the region's economy. However, the commercial exploration of crude oil by the Shell petroleum company in the mid-1950s changes the economic fortune of the region. Gradually, farms lands and water were taken over by the excess pollution from the activities of the oil companies. The local rivers and farm lands were polluted while the people had to struggle to make ends meet. This led to a temporary uprising led by Isaac AdakaBoro in the mid-1960s while his small insurrection group was crushed within few days of its formation. From the late 1990s, resistance against the persistent unusual oil exploration activities by the Oil Multinational companies (MNCs) operating in the Niger Delta

region of Nigeria became more violent in nature. The negative impact of the activities of the oil MNCs on environmental security in the region has been analyzed in several literatures. Hence, oil related environmental malaise has been a major issue in security discourse about oil producing communities in the Niger Delta region since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa state in 1956.

The oil exploration by the numerous oil multi-national companies operating in the region has done enormous damage to the area's ecosystem. This was attested to by many scholars such as (Ake, 1994; Akhape 2016; and Ayodeji and Okwechime, 2016) who have researched on this topic. These scholars attributed the highly degraded environment in the Niger Delta to the deficient oil exploration activities of the oil multi-nationals. In view of this, this paper takes a departure, by examining the extent to which the activities of the third parties have contributed to environmental insecurity (degradation) in the region. Third parties in this context refer to the pipeline vandals, oil thieves and operators of illegal modular refineries. Environmental security on the other hand refers to the protection of fauna and flora from both artificial and natural disasters. It also refers to the integrity of land, water, and air which make human habitation possible (Bajpai, 2000). It is usually measured by the extent to which the natural state of the environment is protected from natural and artificial hazards that can constitute damage to it.

The article is divided into six sections for a convincing discussion of the subject matter of the paper. The first section gives an introductory background about the subject matter of the study while the second section undertakes a review of relevant literature about the topic of discourse. The third section gives a brief about the methodology of the work, while the fourth section shows the result from the field work and secondary materials to demonstrate the nexus between the trio of SALW proliferation, oil sabotage and environmental security in the post amnesty Niger Delta. The fifth section discuss findings from the field work while sixth section is about conclusion of the work which is based on findings from the field about the implications of SALWs proliferation for environmental security in the post amnesty Niger Delta. This period is important to show the extent to which the activities of the third party in the region are impacting negatively on the area's ecosystem in spite of the numerous efforts by the government and oil MNCs to address the menace. The activities of the third party in the area of oil bunkering and pipeline vandalisation is problematic because it is emboldened by the availability of firearms and it is also encouraging arms proliferation. Hence investigating its impact on environmental security and sustainability becomes essential. However, the paper does not intend to absolve the oil MNCs of any wrong doing in their cause of oil exploration in the region.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Oil conflict

This refers to a dispute based on the control of crude oil resources. It is a vastly polemical issue that has geopolitical, economic and environmental consequences. Despite its prevalence across the globe, Meierding (2020) described oil conflict as a myth as she contended that the proponents of oil wars usually underestimate the ability to seize and exploit foreign oil fields and as a consequence they exaggerate the value of oil wars. However, oil conflict in the context of this study refers to the contestation over crude oil exploration in the Nigeria's Niger Delta between the federal government, Oil Multinationals and the indigenous people of the region. The oil violence in the Nigeria coastal cities of the Niger Delta can be trace to the early 1990s (2007) and from this period onwards, it has continued to define the political landscape in the Niger

Delta. The conflict has mutated as it has shifted from mere violent over oil resources to general state of insecurity. This is as result of the prevalence of different form of violence and criminal activities in the region. These include kidnapping, petro piracy, and cultism among others.

2.1.2 Arms proliferations

Proliferation generally has a biological origin which refers to the rapid increase in number or the rapid production of new parts while in the context of security studies it refers to the spread of production technologies of arms of different categories (Dunne, 2007). Furthermore, it refers to the pervasiveness, acquisition and accumulations of weapons and military technology with a corresponding increase in the availability of weapons in various regions or among various groups. Specifically, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons refers to the increase in number or the blooming of the number of firearms in circulation, most especially in the hands of unauthorized individuals and groups (Adiat, 2020). Within the Niger Delta context, arms proliferations refer to the pervasiveness or increasing accumulation of SALWs by the non-states actors in the region which include individuals and groups. It is fallout of the oil conflict in the region which started since the 1990s.

2.1.3 Environmental security

Environmental security according to the UNDP report of 1994 refers to the aspect of human security that focus of the protection of people from the short term and long-term ravages of nature, man made threats in nature and deterioration of national environment (UNDP Report, 1994). Thus, the national environment is a very fragile ecosystem that needs to be protected, and it is also a repository for natural resources (Goldstein, 2004). It also refers to the protection of natural resources and ecosystem to ascertain the overall wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants. The extraction of such resources brings status, wealth and power, so these resources regularly become a source of international conflicts (Zacher and Mark, 1993). In addition, these resources do not only generate international conflicts, it also generates Intra State Conflicts. For instance, the conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta region has been in existence for a very long time before the 2009 amnesty programme that was offered to the militants. The conflict was caused by a fierce competition for resources between the militants and the government, as well as Oil spills and marginalization of the people in the oil rich region. Environmental security in this context refers to the protection of the Niger delta environment from different kind of pollutions form oil exploration activities. According to Dobson (2002), environmental security is essential for the sustainability of development and the maintenance of peace and stability in the world.

2.1.4 Crude Oil Theft

Crude Oil Theft is the illicit act of stealing crude oil from pipelines, oil well or storage facilities with the intention of selling it to the black market. The stealing in most cases is through the tapping of crude oil from pipelines transporting the crude to its major depot or refineries. The activity is rampant in many oil producing regions across many states of the world with the Niger Delta region of Nigeria inclusive. According to Yusuf (2022), Nigeria in 2022 lost about 10 billion dollars to crude oil theft in seven months. Crude oil theft in Nigeria is estimated to worth billions of dollars which are lost to oil thieves annually. Omoro and Iwendi (2016) noted the effects of crude oil theft in the Niger Delta to include: destruction of aquatic life in the water and degradation of for farming

2.1.5 Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in the Niger Delta

In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation has a long history which predates the era of colonialism and postcolonial period (Ukeje, 2006). In the Post-colonial era, the trade in palm oil which was prevalent during the pre-colonial and colonial days shifted to crude oil as the main article of trade which determines Nigeria's global economic relations (Ako, Okonmah and Ogunleye, 2009). Consequently, the politics of oil conflicts between the Federal Government, Oil multinational corporations and the indigenous people of the Niger Delta serve as the catalyst for the proliferation of SALW in the post-colonial Niger Delta. The discovery of oil in Oloibiri in commercial quantity in Bayelsa state in 1956 change the fortune of Nigeria as the country was able to have access to more revenue which increases the state's power and influence. Literature on the contemporary origin and causes of SALW proliferation in the Niger Delta is quite expansive, while most scholars have linked the proliferation of SALW in the post-colonial Niger Delta to the discovery of Crude Oil in 1956.

Nagbantou (2006), in his study, argued that before the current oil conflict in the Niger Delta, there was a low level of mis-use of SALW by non-state actors in the region. This implied that massive proliferation of SALW in the region is a post-colonial development. Furthermore, oil conflict in the region has resulted in the increasing proliferation of SALW as well as an upsurge of deadly non state armed groups which are out of control. Ukeje (2006) in affirmation with this view also noted that the neglect of the goodwill and confidence of the Niger Delta people by early Nigerian government at independence has made the region to become the most militarized in the country and with the largest concentration of arms in the country. Agbigboa (2013) with a similar view in his study on armed groups, Arms proliferation and Amnesty in the Niger Delta region argued that a major reason why SALW proliferate so easily in the region is because there are demands for them. Using the social contract theory, he further contended that, the demand for the arms is as a result of the failure of the social contract between the Nigerian state and its citizens. Hence, the failure of Nigerian state to provide for the security of the people of the region is responsible for social disorder in the area as well as the perception of arms as a surrogate for social justice (Ibid). Basically, SALW is instigated by the politics of oil conflicts between the Nigerian Government, Oil MNCs and the indigenous people of Niger Delta. When the struggle against environmental degradation, social exclusion and endemic poverty in the region started in the 1990s, it was essentially a non-violent protest movement (Adebanjoko, 2017). However, the violent clampdown on the protesters led to the militarization of the struggle. This situation then encouraged the proliferation of deadly weapons and the use of mercenaries.

From a slightly different perspective, Ako, Okonmah, and Ogunleye (2009) argued through the lens of social justice approach with a contention that:

The exclusion of the local communities from participation in the exploitation and benefits of the natural resource (palm oil and crude oil) in the region is the reason for SALW proliferation and violent conflicts in both colonial and post-colonial Niger Delta. Hence, the underlying causes of crude oil conflicts in the post-colonial Niger Delta is structurally similar to the causes of palm oil conflicts in the same region in the nineteenth century (Ako, Okonmah, and Ogunleye, 2009).

The views of these scholars shows that SALW proliferation in the post-colonial Niger Delta was as a result of the marginalization of the indigenous people by the Nigerian Government and Oil MNCs. For most of these scholars, frustration with their economic and social condition created the excess demand for SALW in the Niger Delta. This was further buttressed by Asuni(2009)

where she noted that the federal government virtually ignored the Niger Delta during the 1990s, leaving development in the hands of the oil companies in an era when corporate social responsibility has little significance. While this is apposite as basis for SALW proliferation in the pre-amnesty Niger Delta, the question that requires a more intellectual discussion is about why there is still massive arms proliferation in the post amnesty Niger Delta and what impact does this have on environmental security in the region.

2.1.6 Crude Oil Exploration and Environmental Security in the Niger Delta

Environmental malaise in Nigeria's Niger delta includes both oil and non-oil environmental problems. However, the oil related environmental malaise has attracted more attention from scholars as a result of its malignant effect on environmental security in the region. Reflecting on human vulnerabilities posed by oil exploration in the Niger-Delta region, Ake (1994) observed that:

As much as the percentage of all the natural gas from petroleum in Nigeria is flared compared to 0.6 percent in the United States, 4.3 percent in the UK, 21 percent in Libya; the flaring is a serious hazard. At temperature of 1,300 to 1,400 degree centigrade, the multitude of flares in the Niger-Delta heat up everything causing noise pollution and producing CO₂, VOC-CO-NO and flaring in Nigeria release 35 million tons of CO₂ a year and 12 million tons of methane which means that Nigerian oil fields contribute more to global warming than the rest of the World together (Ake, 1994).

It is apparent from the above observation that gas flaring and oil pollution inflict vast damage on the environment which greatly affects human lives in the region. Akhape (2016) further argued that this practice has continued without any serious effort by relevant authorities to either address such environmental injustice or regulate its occurrence. He further asserted that:

Although the present civilian administration has made major efforts to ameliorate the suffering of the people of the region, their conditions remain pitiable and unless the present government's efforts are directed towards improving the peoples' socio-economic and political conditions, the restiveness and violence in the Niger-Delta region in particular and Nigeria in general would continue unabated (Akhape, 2016).

Corroborating the above view, Aduloju and Okwechime (2016) in their study interrogated the challenges of human security in the Niger Delta region within the context of oil exploration in the area. Their study revealed that environmental security challenges in the region are caused by unusual oil exploration activities of the Oil MNCs. These include; water pollution, noise pollution, air pollution, food insecurity, poverty, conflict and unemployment. Furthermore, the study indicated that the consequences of oil induced human security challenges in the region include pipeline vandalism, oil theft, kidnapping, sea piracy, food crisis, outbreak of diseases, famine and hunger. While these challenges and their implications for human security in the region are factual, the study did not examine environmental hazards of the activities of the third parties which is facilitated by the pervasiveness of SALW in the region.

Ajala (2016) from a similar perspective explored the effect of human insecurity engendered by the unusual oil exploration on the outbreak of violence in the region. The main argument of the study was that, unusual oil exploration activities of MNCs is the major cause of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. The study showed that the social exclusion of the indigenous people of the region in the management of crude oil in the region is the cause of violent conflict

and environmental insecurity in the area. The study concluded that the involvement of the community people in all developmental initiatives for the region is a panacea to addressing environmental insecurity in the area.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the inordinate exploration of crude oil by the oil multi-nationals is a major source of environmental insecurity (degradation) in the region (Browne et al, 2013). The unusual activities include frequent oil spills, gas flaring, dredging, destruction of mangroves, and dumping of drilling waste which has intensified environmental destruction in the region. The effect of these is evident in the loss of livelihoods in farming and fishing due to contamination of water and land. Access to clean water has been compromised in many areas and the Delta is no longer self-sufficient in food while contaminated water and food from the area elevate the risk of developing multiple forms of cancer (Ibid). This view was buttressed by Oluduro and Oluduro (2012), as they posited that environmental pollution by means of oil spillage and gas flaring is the lots and bane of the Niger Delta region. These activities which are perpetuated majorly by the oil companies and pipeline vandals have increased the level of environmental insecurity in the region.

2.1.7 Crude Oil Theft in the Niger Delta in Pre and Post Amnesty Era

The illegal tapping of crude oil from pipelines is an illegal commercial activity which is not peculiar to Nigeria's Niger Delta oil rich region in West Africa. In the 1980s, there were incidences of oil theft in the United States where oil thieves were stealing crude oil from tanks (Soremi, 2020). There are also cases of oil theft in countries such as Mexico in North America and Indonesia in South East Asia (Ibid). This shows that crude oil theft is a global menace in many oil producing states. However, crude oil theft in Nigeria's Niger Delta is an egregious criminal activity in the Gulf of Guinea which has made Nigerian waters to be the most unsafe in the region (Lucia, 2015). It is estimated that about 150,000 barrels of crude oil are stolen every day in Nigeria's Niger Delta while the vast majority of this is sold internationally, but about 25% stays in the region for refining and consumption (Stakeholder Democracy Network, 2020).

More recent data on crude oil theft in the Niger Delta estimated Nigeria's stolen crude at 600000 barrel per day (Okungbowa, 2023). Crude oil theft in the region is a big commercial enterprise which involves a web of actors at local, regional and international level (Watts, 2007). However, one of the consequences of this illegal business activity is the proliferation of SALW proliferation which is also driven by the business of oil bunkering (Ikelegbe, 2005). This is because oil bunkering business serves as a means of exchange between the armed groups and foreign arms suppliers in the region (Adiat, 2020). This shows that crude oil theft is a complex commercial enterprise which involves both local and foreign perpetrators. TekenaTamuno a renown Nigerian historian from the Niger Delta rightly captures this as he explains that:

Between 1999 and 2003, persons in high political circles had their own huge private oil platforms deployed in the creeks of the Niger Delta and they are perpetrated with impunity. When the business circumstances were no longer favourable to them, they moved to the new vantage points outside Nigeria. This class of people include retired military personnels, customs, and immigration officials, Nigeria Police Force Officers and their operations was mainly in the oxygen states of Niger Delta which include Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers (Tamuno, 2011).

Furthermore, he explained that the activities of these members of the political class are brought to the fore by strong militant leaders which are described as the sharks and whales of the messy world of oil politics. This particularly refers to the prominent and strong militant leaders from the region. The implication of this is that, SALW trafficking and the business of oil bunkering occur simultaneously and they serve the interest of the members of the political class. The involvement of these members of the political class is one of the major factors why the covert and illegal crude oil bunkering business has become very prominent in the region with its attendant effects on the environment. The oil bunkering business facilitated by SALW proliferation has also intensified rivalry among the militant groups about territorial control of the business of oil theft in the area (Ikelegbe, 2005). This is because it serves as a source of ascertained funds for unauthorized acquisition of SALW.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the securitization theory to explain the research problem for the study. This entails the examination of the activities of third parties aided by SALW proliferation as a risk for environment security in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The theory is an outgrowth of social constructivism which is one of the critical approaches to the concept of security. The theory was pioneered by the Copenhagen school which came into existence at the Conflict Peace Research Institute (COPRI) of Copenhagen (Emmers, 2013). Its major proponents include Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde and many others. The school in its approach to rethinking security has developed certain concepts such as securitization and desecuritisation. Securitization in this context is the process whereby state and non-state actors' transforms an issue from regular political issue into matters of "security" which enables extraordinary means to be used in the name of security (Buzan, 1998). Desecuritisation on the other hand is the removal of an issue from the extreme spectrum of securitization to an ordinary political issue. Basically, the theory emerged at the end of the cold war to challenge the dominant paradigm which focused on narrow military security issues as the focal point of security concern. As a consequence, the theory identified five areas that should be the concern of any security efforts, while non state actors were also included as security actors. These areas include military, economic, environment, societal and political security. The criteria for securitization of an issue according to the school include a securitizing actor which can be a state or non-state actor, a referent object and a speech act. Security analysis which is an integral part of securitization requires risk assessment before an issue can become securitized.

However, securitization of a risk is determined by the views or perception of an actor (Wilde, 2008). This is because risks are hard to define in abstraction because of different meanings or views that can be attached to them (Brauch, 2005 and Thywissen, 2006). The process of securitizing a specific public issue is a two-stage process. The first stage is about the politicization of a public issue to become a matter for consideration on the political agenda. The second which is the most crucial state is the making of such an issue a matter of high priority that requires an extra ordinary measure in addressing it. It is at this stage that a public issue can be claimed to have been securitized. An important factor that is essential to this two-stage process is what is described as the "speech act". The speech act is thus described as the discursive representation of an issue as an existential threat to a referent object of security (Emmers, 2013). This theory is relevant and essential to the study because it helps in understanding the subject matter of the study. Specifically, it shows the importance of securitizing the menace of third

parties and SALW proliferation in the discourse on environmental security in the Niger Delta. Specifically, SALW proliferation is a security threat that has been established in literature for different aspect of human security which environmental security is inclusive (Soetan, 2017). Within the Niger Delta context, arms proliferation worsens the conflict and violence in the region (Uzodike, 2006 and Ebaye and Okon, 2021). Thus, it brings about an increase in the incidence of oil theft across the region. This usually worsens cases of oil spills through the illegal means of extracting crude oil in the region. It is in this regard that SALWs proliferation is securitized as an environmental security threat in Nigeria's post amnesty Niger Delta

4. Methodology

The data for this study were generated from both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary data was obtained through the conduct of unstructured interviews which were undertaken in the three core states of the Niger Delta which include Delta, Rivers, and Bayelsa states as well as the federal capital territory. The unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 purposively selected respondents from federal and state government institutions as well as selected local communities between August 2018 and January 2019. Supplementary interviews were also conducted between September and October 2022. The federal government ministries and institutions include, National Oil Spill Detection Agency, National Maritime Agency, Nigeria Customs Service and the Navy. The selected riverine local communities in the three core states of Niger Delta include Oporoza and Gbaramatu in Delta, Nembe and Odi in Bayelsa, Bonny and Ogoni in Rivers states respectively. These communities were selected because of their experiences of varying degrees of oil related environmental challenges. The article also extract data from secondary sources which includes published and unpublished scholarly works from journals, seminar papers, articles, newspapers, news magazines, conference proceedings, Internet sources, dissertations and government publications from relevant security agencies and think thank organizations. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and content analyses.

5. Results

5.1 Crude Oil Theft, SALW Proliferation and Environmental Degradation in the post-amnesty era

Environmental pollution associated with crude oil exploration in the Niger Delta has been linked mostly to the activities of multinational oil corporations operating in the region. However, data obtained from the field work shows that in the post amnesty era, the activities of the third parties which include pipeline vandals and oil thieves are largely responsible for majority of the cases of environmental degradation in the region. Although, the interviewees have different views about the extent to which crude oil theft and pipeline vandalisation is worsening environmental degradation in the region. While some of them believed that the activity of the third parties which is aided by SALW really threatens the environment, others believe that it does not really have much impact on their ecosystem. The latter's view is that; the damaged ecosystem in the region is basically as a result of the operations of the oil companies. This is due to their inability to properly maintain oil facilities which include pipelines that transports crude oil to its destination. In their view, the activities of the militant groups become essential as a result of the several years of neglect of the region and failure of the federal government to address

developmental issues in the area. According to one of the respondents from one of the local communities visited in Bayelsa state, he explained that:

For us in our community, these guys are our brothers who have taken up arms to defend our interest that the government has abandoned for several years. Their activities are necessary because the only language the government understands is violence. However, the pollution of the environment has been worsening largely by the activities of the oil companies through corrosion and equipment failure. Consequently, the indigenes had to revolt against the devastation of their environment which is not suitable for good living. Nevertheless, the activities of the armed groups through pipeline vandalism only contributed in small quantity to environmental degradation in the region.¹

The implication of the above extract from the interviewee is that the third parties and their use of SALW proliferation is not responsible for the massive pollution of the environment in the Niger Delta. Hence, the activities of the oil companies have been described as the real cause of environmental insecurity in the region. This was also affirmed by another respondent from an oil producing community in Rivers State who reiterated that:

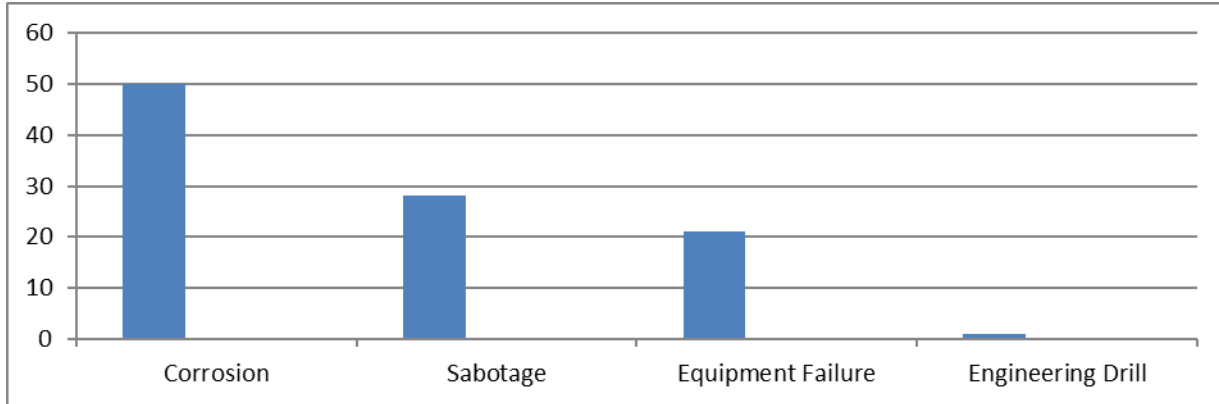
If at all it has any effect, the activities of the armed groups only affect the environment minimally. Basically, the inability of the oil multinational to follow standard global practice in oil exploration is the reason for the massive environmental degradation in the region. This unusual practice was also aided by the federal government failure to take the germane steps necessary for addressing the plight of the people who are losing their lands everyday while living in a dangerously polluted atmosphere.²

The view of these respondents which represent the views of a host of others is supported by the findings of a former commandant of the Nigerian Civil Defense Corps, Ade Abolurin in 2008. In his book on Environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region, he stated that 71% of oil spillage in the region was caused by corrosion and oil production operations. Specifically, he quoted Badejo and Nwiloby stating that:

Fifty percent (50%) of oil spills in the region is due to corrosion, twenty eight percent (28%) to sabotage and twenty one percent (21%) to oil production operations. Also one percent (1%) is due to oil engineering drills, inability to effectively control oil wells, failure of machines, and inadequate care in loading and unloading oil vessels(Badejo and Nwilo, 2004).

This is shown in figure I which presents the graphical illustration of the causes of oil spillage in the region in the pre-amnesty era. The figures are expressed in percentage of occurrence of incidence.

Figure I: Causes of Oil Spillage in the Pre-Amnesty Niger Delta



Source: Badejo and Nwilo (2004)

On the other hand, another set of respondents who are also indigenes from the selected local communities express the view that SALW proliferation have great negative impact on environmental degradation in the region. For these respondents, vandalisation of pipeline which is aided by the pervasiveness of SALW is contributing immensely to the worsening level of environmental degradation in the region. One of the respondents in this category explained that:

Pipeline vandalism and oil bunkering business in the community is contributing immensely to environmental pollution in the region. For instance, in our community, while Shell petroleum company did enormous damage here, the activities of oil Bunkerers and vandals is also affecting our land, soil, water and air. This is because, each time pipelines are blown up or tapped, the immediate community is the one that suffers the consequences.³

Some of the respondents who are environmental staffs from a government environmental agency and four academic experts on security from the four selected Nigerian universities debunked the views that corrosion and equipment failures is more responsible for the continue environmental degradation in the region in the post amnesty era. While they did not completely absolve the Oil MNCs of production irregularities, they are of the view that corrosion and equipment failure massively caused environmental degradation in the pre-amnesty era. According to one of the respondents, he contended that:

The activities of the third parties are responsible for the majority of the incidence of oil spillages in the post-amnesty Niger Delta. Basically, 80% of oil spillage in Bayelsa and Rivers states was caused by pipeline vandalisation and oil bunkering while 20% accounts for operational errors by the oil companies.⁴

This means that in post-amnesty Niger Delta, majority of the spillage are caused by the activities of third parties which include pipeline vandalisation, oil bunkering and scooping. Another respondent, who is an environmental officer from Delta state, asserted that the causes of oil spillage in the region vary from one state to another. However, activities of the third parties have been responsible for majority of the spillage recently. In her words:

Delta state is one of the most affected states in the region by the activities of the numerous armed groups in the area. With massive availability of SALW, the groups have been emboldened in the act of pipeline

vandalisation and the business of oil bunkering which has contributed in no small quantity to incidence of oil spillages and consequent environmental degradation in the region. This has been more prevalent in the post-amnesty era.⁵

Corroborating the view above, another respondent who is a senior academic staff at a state university in the region explained that the increase in illegal activities of pipeline vandalisation and oil bunkering by the various armed groups in the region threatens the environment greatly. According to him:

While the environment has already been degraded for several years as a result of the unusual oil exploration activities of the Oil MNCs, the constant vandalisation of oil pipelines and the business of oil bunkering is also worsening environmental degradation in the region. This is because, after the pipeline has been blown up or tapped, the community where the incidence occurs is always at the receiving end of the negative consequence of the act. Specifically, more crude oil is spilled into the environment which in turn damage farm lands and increased environmental pollution in the region.⁶

The views of the above respondents are strongly supported by available data on oil spillage and environmental degradation from a government agency. This shows that, the activities of the armed groups are bolstered by the massive availability of SALW which aided their business of pipeline vandalisation and oil bunkering. Table II and figure I show the causes and volume of oil spillage in the region from 2009 to 2017.

Table II: No of Spill Incidents and Volume of Oil Spills (in thousand barrels) in Niger Delta from 2009 -2017.

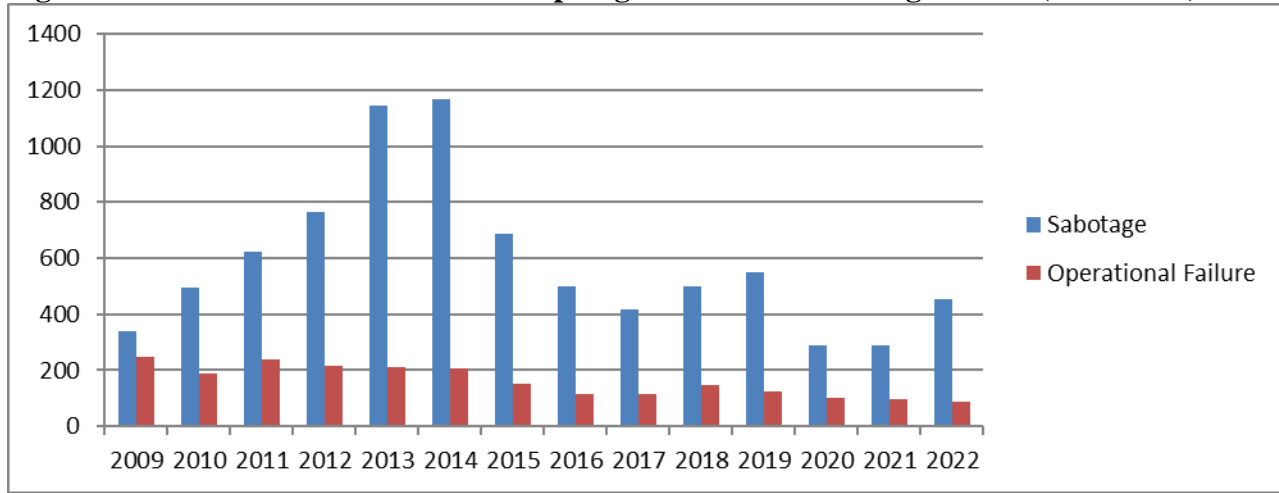
Years	Spill Incidents	Volume of Spills
2009	849	48,935.55
2010	537	17,658.10
2011	673	66,906.84
2012	844	17,526.37
2013	522	4,066.20
2014	1087	10,302.16
2015	753	32,756.87
2016	434	1,658.98
2017	429	9,097.05

Source: Department of Petroleum Resources (2018)

During this period as reflected in table I, Nigeria recorded close to 250,000 barrels of Oil spill which was caused largely by act of sabotage such as pipeline vandalisation and oil bunkering (Izuora, 2018). According to the Director of Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) in his paper presentation in 2018, he pointed out that majority of Spill incidences in the region are caused by oil thieves. As stated by him, out of about 6,128 spill incidents, 54% of the spillage was caused by suspected oil thieves, 12% by equipment failure, 5% due to corrosion, Operational error

2% and yet to be determined cases 27%(Ibid). Figure I demonstrate the actual percentage and numbers attributed to different causes of oil spillage in the region between 2009 and 2022.

Figure III: Numbers and causes of Oil Spillage incidence in the Niger Delta (2009-2022).



Source: National Oil Spill Detection Agency (2023)

The data in figure two presents a more recent statistics about the causes of oil spillage from 2009 to 2022. As shown on the table, majority of the cases of oil spillage in the post amnesty Niger Delta is attributed to the activities of the third parties. The sabotaging activities of these third parties were at the apex between 2013 and 2014 with about 1144 and 1165 incidence of spillage respectively. The sabotage activities according to a respondent were caused by oil thieves who are greatly involved in the business of oil bunkering. Specifically, he explained that

The role of SALW in the business of oil bunkering and pipeline vandalisation are in two forms. Firstly, in the aspect of vandalisation by the militants, weapons such as barrel bombs and dynamites are used to blow up the pipelines. This subsequently led to oil spillage and consequent degradation of the environment. In the case of oil bunkering, arms are acquired for protection purposes from security agencies while engineering drills is actually conducted on the pipelines to tap the crude from it. In the two cases, the militants and other armed groups are only able to carry out their illegal activities due to their access to sophisticated weapons. This enables them to challenge security operatives who are saddled with the responsibility of curbing their nefarious activities.⁷

The implication of the above view is that SALW proliferation is a motivating factor which emboldens the armed groups to challenge the authority of the state in their course of pipeline vandalisation and oil scooping. This in turn worsens environmental degradation in the region.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

As shown by the finding of the study, SALW proliferation has great impact on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region in both Pre and Post Amnesty periods. However, with the post amnesty period as a scope of this paper, the study shows that oil spillage which is a consequence of pipeline vandalism and oil thefts has vast negative impact on soil composition

and water bodies in the region in this era. As presented in figure I, about 78.62% of cases or incidence of oil spillage in the post amnesty era were caused by third party activities. Furthermore, SALW proliferation within this period also has a significant impact on the increase in attacks on oil facilities in the country. This demonstrates that the incidence of oil spillage across the region has been caused mainly by the activities of the third parties. For instance, in 2016 and 2017, there was high rate of SALW proliferation in the region which was between 90 and 78.62 percent respectively (Adiat, 2020). Consequently, it was also revealed during this period that, about 78.62 percent of oil spillage is caused by third party activities in the three states under study. This shows the nexus between SALW proliferation and Oil induced environmental malady in the region. This is against what is obtainable in the previous literature, where majority of the incidences of cases of oil spillage has been attributed to the activities of oil companies. Findings from this study reveal that, the activities of the oil companies are only responsible for about 21.38% of the incidences of oil spillage in the period under consideration.

In its connection to the menace of environmental security in the region, SALW in the hands of the non-state armed groups are used for pipeline vandalism and also for protection from state security forces by those in the business of oil bunkering. As demonstrated by the findings of the study, SALW facilitates vandalism of pipelines and the business of oil bunkering. This means that it will be difficult to engage in these criminal acts without access to these portable and lethal weapons. This is because of the nature of security that is provided for oil installations and the complexities that are involved in tapping crude oil from a pipeline. Importantly, SALW emboldened the armed groups who are mostly militants to embark on these illegal activities. While pipeline vandalism is usually a protest against poor environmental practices by Oil MNCs. Crude oil theft is a complex and booming illegal business activities which involve both foreign and local collaborators. Unfortunately, both pipeline vandalism and oil theft have contributed immensely to environmental degradation in the region. For instance, the Shell Petroleum Development Company asserts that 90% of environmental degradation in the region was caused by spillages from the activities of crude oil thieves, sabotage of oil facilities and illegal distillation of crude oil which is facilitated by the use of SALW (Shell Petroleum Development Company, 2018). This does not imply that Oil MNCs no longer pollute the environment. However, corporate social responsibility (CSR) pact has reduced the quantities of oil spills that are due to oil operations, either through corrosion or equipment failure.

The implication of this finding is that, SALW proliferation in the post-amnesty Niger Delta has great consequences for environmental degradation in the region. Leaked crude from vandalized and tapped pipelines worsens the already degraded environment through spillage activities by the oil companies. This makes the environment to become very hazardous for the sustenance of people in the region. The oil induced environmental challenges include Gas leaks and flares, oil spillage and canalization. As revealed by the findings of the study, the proliferation of SALW is worsening the occurrence of these various oil induced environmental hazards. For instance in 2016, militants on two speed boats blew up Crude oil pipeline in Kurutie, Delta state with the use of dynamite after a similar explosion at Chanomi creeks in warri south west local government area of Delta State (Thisday, 2016). Similarly, in Bayelsa state, suspected militants attacked and set aflame an Agip pipeline at Ikiengbenbiri community in Southern Ijaw local council of Bayelsastate (Voice of America, 2018). These are just few incidences cited of cases of pipeline bombings most especially in 2016. The resulting effect of these incidences was the desertation of the communities by the indigenous people. This constitutes community insecurity on the part of

the local people, alongside health insecurity as a result of fog of smoke that massively pollutes the atmosphere in the area.

As illustrated in these communities, the activities of the pipeline vandals and oil thieves result in massive pollution of land, water, air and destruction of fauna and flora. This consequent environmental hazard from pipeline vandalism and oil theft also generates other forms of insecurity. These include concerns for health, community and food security in the affected communities in the region. As a result of this pollution, people are exposed to different kind of poisonous gas and chemical elements from the vandalized pipelines. For instance, UNEP report on Ogoni community in 2011 revealed that the soil in the community has been polluted extensively by hydrocarbons from crude oil. This organic compound is produced mainly by distillation process of natural substance such as coal and they also form large amount in petroleum refining, especially the cracking process (Davis, 2009). This implies that activities that bother on crude oil exploration either legally or illegally are responsible for the large deposit of hydrocarbons in the soil composition across these oil producing communities. This is worsening by the proliferation of modular refineries and their illegal and substandard oil distillation processes.

The hydrocarbons that are deposited into the soil through this process also have effect on the ground water which serves the various communities in the region while the most affected community is Nsirikiken Ogale in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers state (United Nations Environmental Programme, 2011). The consequence of the above is damaged farmlands, contaminated water which exposes the people to different kind of diseases such as pneumonia, cancer, and respiratory problems. This is the nature of health and food insecurity that is experienced in most communities where pipeline vandalism and illegal oil distillation is taken place. This further shows that the activity of armed groups, mostly militants is responsible for majority of oil related environmental problems in the post-amnesty era. This is a new and significant finding which shows how SALW proliferation is aggravating environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta region.

5.3 Conclusion

This paper investigates the extent to which the activities of the third parties (Oil Thieves and Pipeline Vandals) enhanced by the proliferation of SALW engenders environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta. The findings of the study reveal that the majority of the incidences of environmental degradation through oil spillage in the region are caused by the activities of the third parties which include pipeline vandals and oil thieves. This has been aided by the massive proliferation of SALW which is facilitating the activities of these saboteurs to disrupt oil productions and worsen environmental degradation in the region. While the study does not exonerate the oil companies from the incidences of oil induced environmental malaise in the region, the paper concluded that third party activities has greatly worsen the oil induced environmental malaise in the region. This is evident in the proliferation of modular refineries and the large scale and commercial nature of the business of oil bunkering. This has exhibited adverse effect on the integrity of land, water and air in the region. In addition to this, crude oil theft and pipeline vandalisation is also increasing the demand for SALW in the region. Hence, the Federal government and Oil MNCs must effectively address the problem of arms proliferation in the region and also strengthen surveillance security system to address worsening environmental crisis in the area.

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Endnotes

¹ Interview, October 16, 2018

² Interview, November 9, 2019

³ Interview, November 9, 2018

⁴ Interview, October 13, 2018

⁵ Interview, October 8, 2018

⁶ Interview, September 5, 2018

⁷ Interview, October 5, 2022