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ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract
The problem of environmental degradation and its effect on poverty alleviation has attracted both local and international concern in recent times. The study sets out to examine the issue of Environmental Degradation and poverty alleviation in selected communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. To achieve this broad aim, data were collected from 320 respondents. The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The cluster and quasi random techniques were used to select participants for the study. Tables, percentages and charts were applied in the data analysis process. Findings revealed that there is a significant link between environmental degradation and inability to achieve poverty alleviation in the selected communities despite all government attempts. This is simply rooted in the fact that as oil multinational corporations continue in their inhuman destruction of the natural ecosystem, the ability of host communities to promote a healthy livelihood is significantly undermined especially for those that depend on farming, fishing and hunting for their living. The study recommends that the government should devise a workable environmental policy with enforceable sanctions that could go a long way to reduce the trend in environmental degradation and enhance interventions that promote poverty alleviation in communities in Rivers State.

Keywords: *Environmental degradation, poverty alleviation, oil bearing communities, Rivers state.*

Introduction

While the issue of environmental degradation and its effect on poverty is seemingly a global matter, here in Nigeria and in particular the Niger Delta region, the concern has always been on petroleum industry induced environmental degradation. This is mainly because, the oil and gas industry in Nigeria, has caused untold economic hardship especially through the destruction of local livelihood systems of the people.

The exploration and drilling of oil on land and offshore involve a certain amount of alteration of land surface in a conspicuously negative fashion. Vegetation is cleared to make way for seismic lines, sites for drilling rigs are leveled, roads are built, drilling mud and oil may reach streams, surface water and land, thus making them unfit for either domestic or industrial purposes (Adeyemi, 2010). During operation, through accident and other reasons, some quantities of petroleum and its products may be released into the environment during exploration, storage, processing and distribution. All the sectors and sub-sectors of the petroleum and gas industry contribute to a large extent towards increasing the concentration of pollutants discharged from stationary sources into the environment.

The rising concern with environmental degradation issues can be attributed to the emerging arguments on the understanding of our responsibilities to our environment for which we are all custodians. The expansion of the capitalist system of production and the technological power available to man, does not only improve economic growth, but it also gives us the capability of damaging the environment. Man in his endeavour to satisfy his needs and aspirations for better living conditions through resource exploitation, has created an increasing number of environmental problems (Harris, 2021).

Host communities in the Niger Delta region and Rivers State in particular are faced with a duality of problem with regard to the petroleum industry. First, the industry does not serve the livelihood needs of the people. Second, the industry promotes environmental degradation which further undermines the

natural ecosystem as well as the traditional livelihood of the people. All of these take place under successive governments with an obvious weakness for environmental policy enforcement.

Nigeria, as a whole, has grappled with high poverty rates for decades. According to the World Bank (2022), about 40% of Nigeria's population lives below the national poverty line. This figure translates to approximately 82.9 million people experiencing poverty in the country. The 2022 GHI report, published by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, classifies Nigeria's hunger situation as "serious," with a score of 27.3 (Concern Worldwide & Welthungerhilfe, 2022). This score places Nigeria among the countries with the highest levels of hunger globally.

On the other hand, the Niger Delta region, which includes Rivers State, has been disproportionately affected by poverty. This region has faced numerous challenges, including environmental degradation, conflict, and economic instability, which have exacerbated poverty levels. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) reports that over 70% of the population in the Niger Delta region lives below the poverty line. The case of poverty for Rivers State is not too different as according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), the state has a poverty rate of 36.7%, which is higher than the national average.

The issues of environmental degradation and poverty at the local, state, national, and transnational levels have attracted social scientists' interest in recent years (Adeyemi, 2010; Ogadi, Raimi & Nwachukwu, 2012; Adeola, 2015; Fagade, 2019; Mazden, 2020). Adeyemi (2010) explored how environmental degradation at the local level, such as deforestation and soil erosion, has undermined subsistence livelihoods and food security, perpetuating poverty in rural communities. Ogadi et al. (2012) examined how environmental degradation enables poverty and by extension criminality in the Niger Delta. Adeola (2015) and Fagade (2019) adopted a national lens, investigating how weak environmental regulations and governance in Nigeria have allowed activities like gas flaring and industrial pollution to disproportionately affect marginalized populations. Mazden (2020) took a transnational approach, critiquing the role of global capitalism in enabling multinational corporations to externalize environmental costs onto developing nations, contributing to poverty and inequality. Hence, the fact that environmental degradation helps to promote conditions for poverty is now a well-established fact in the literature. For instance, in the Niger Delta region, environmental degradation has significantly exacerbated poverty levels due to the devastating impacts of oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and habitat destruction. These environmental hazards have contaminated water sources, damaged farmlands and fishing grounds, disrupted traditional livelihoods based on agriculture and natural resources, caused health problems from exposure to pollutants, and fueled conflicts and displacement. As a result, many communities in the region have experienced a loss of income sources, food insecurity, increased medical expenses, and disruption of their way of life, pushing them deeper into poverty and economic hardship.

Hence, the major attributes of the world capitalist system shifting environmental pollution and its negative impacts to vulnerable communities both in developing nations have been addressed by numerous scholars (Adeola, 2015; Clapp, 2021; Moyers 2022). Adeola (2015) highlights how multinational corporations often locate their polluting industries and activities in developing nations with lax environmental regulations, exposing local communities to toxic contaminants. This environmental injustice disproportionately burdens marginalized populations with the health and economic consequences of pollution. Clapp (2021) examines the phenomenon of toxic waste trade, where hazardous wastes from industrialized countries are exported to poorer nations lacking proper disposal facilities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and environmental degradation. Moyers (2022) critiques the exploitative nature of global capitalism, which prioritizes profit over environmental and social costs, enabling corporations to externalize pollution onto vulnerable populations in the Global South. These scholars shed light on how the capitalist system facilitates the displacement of environmental burdens onto developing nations, exacerbating poverty, health risks, and marginalization for already disadvantaged communities. As a result, these studies are all united in agreeing that environmental degradation promotes adverse human development conditions that exacerbate poverty.

While the studies highlighted above have helped in extending knowledge on how environmental degradation increases poverty situations in Nigeria and other parts of the world, they nevertheless failed to show how environmental degradation can affect poverty alleviation. This suggests a gap in knowledge since actual poverty is both theoretically and practically different from alleviation of poverty. In the light of the above, this study seeks to examine the link between environmental degradation and poverty alleviation in selected communities in Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

i. Determine the causes of environmental degradation in selected community in Rivers State.
ii. Examine how environmental degradation enables poverty in selected communities in Rivers State.
iii. Examine the extent to which environmental degradation affects poverty alleviation attempts in the study area.
iv. Highlight the factors militating against effective environmental protection and poverty alleviation in Rivers State.

Conceptual clarification

Environmental Degradation: In the context of this study, environmental degradation refers to the deterioration or destruction of the natural environment and its resources, which disproportionately impacts and exacerbates the living conditions of impoverished communities. This degradation can manifest in various forms, such as air and water pollution from industrial activities or resource extraction, deforestation, soil erosion, and the depletion of natural habitats. These environmental issues often directly undermine the livelihoods, food security, and health of poor populations who heavily rely on natural resources for sustenance, income generation, and basic needs. Consequently, environmental degradation perpetuates a vicious cycle, diminishing the already limited access to clean water, arable land, and other vital resources, further entrenching poverty and hampering economic opportunities for vulnerable communities.

Poverty Alleviation: Poverty alleviation refers to the coordinated efforts and strategies aimed at reducing and ultimately eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions. It encompasses a multifaceted approach that addresses the underlying causes and manifestations of poverty, including lack of access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and basic amenities. Poverty alleviation initiatives typically involve economic empowerment programs, such as microfinance and skill development initiatives, social safety net programs that provide direct assistance to the poor, and investments in critical infrastructure like housing, clean water, and sanitation facilities.

Literature Review

Causes & Effects of Environmental Degradation

The quest for industrialization and sustained development in Nigeria and the attendant improvement in the quality of life of the populace has taken its toll on the environment (Aina, 2008). The effects of different industrial sector activities on the environment vary enormously but it is an incontrovertible statement that damage is being done to the environment worldwide. Ajayi and Adesina (2015) and Slack (2016) agreed that environmental degradation denotes deterioration in the environment, that could have a deleterious effect on human health, harm living resources, ecosystem and material property and damage amenities or interfere with other legitimate uses of the environment.

The causes of pollution are numerous, but most are human related. There are also instances where pollutions are caused by an act of God (Slack, 2016). However, such acts mostly occur as a cumulative effect of human action. As typified in hurricanes, earthquakes / tsunamis, volcanic eruptions etc. Osibanjo (1988) points out that environmental degradation can be classified into domestic and global varieties. The former includes water contamination, air pollution, unsafe disposal of solid and hazardous waste, soil degradation, deforestation, etc. The global variety affects the upper atmosphere causing atmospheric ozone depletion. Domestic environmental pollution may assume global status as a result of its transboundary spillover into another country. An example is the

dumping of toxic waste in developing countries by developed nations (Oyejide, 2018). This experience was encountered by Nigeria in June 1988 when Italy dumped about 4000 tons of toxic and hazardous wastes on the shores of Koko Port in Bendel State, now Delta State (Osibanjo, 1988).

Several types of environmental degradation or pollution can be distinguished; air and atmospheric pollution, water pollution, marine pollution, land pollution and noise pollution. Whichever way environmental degradation may be categorised, it is glaring from the literature that most environmental damage is the resultant effect of industrialization (Fagade, 2019). The progress towards high level industrial activities such as seen in capitalist production can be economically harmful when guided by less stringent environment protection regulations.

It is no longer news that Nigeria has been grappling with environmental challenges. For instance, oil pollution is an unavoidable phenomenon and a natural consequence of petroleum exploration. In the area of petroleum prospecting, Farinloye (2016) reports that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria for more than two decades have been experiencing oil spillage problems which have generated the problems of damage to marine wild life, modification of the ecosystem through species elimination and the delay in biota (fauna and Flora) succession; decrease in fishery resources; the loss of aesthetic values of natural beaches etc.

The magnitude of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta has led to restiveness among the indigenes of the area, particularly among the youths. Vehement protests against the activities of oil prospecting firms, less stringent environmental protection laws and lackadaisical attitude of the government led to the killing of ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Nine by the military regime of Late General Sani Abacha. The killing has however not doused the restiveness in the region as formidable militant groups have emerged in the region. These groups have not only attacked oil installations but have also kidnapped both foreign and indigenous oil staff while demanding ransoms for their release (Ezeobi, 2006).

Perspectives on Poverty Alleviation

Studies on the issue of poverty alleviation have been numerous. There is no paucity of programmes and projects designed and formulated by various bodies and governments for poverty eradication. However, the way poverty is defined or framed has been a major determinant in shaping the ways these programmes are designed. As a result of this, no single universal model has been achieved. A clear understanding of poverty in its entire ramification is therefore necessary in the study of poverty alleviation programmes.

Following a broad categorization, scholars are divided between tackling relative poverty or absolute poverty. Some scholars on the left such as Ogadi et al. (2012); Fagade (2019); Mazden (2020) are of the opinion that the best way to tackle poverty is to address the issue of inequality. They argued that though poverty is not inequality but that solving the problem of inequality can help people out of poverty. Unwin (2017) categorically stated that if we cannot address relative poverty, we cannot eliminate absolute poverty. This view is also expressed in Archibong (2017) that the poor in a society arise spontaneously with inequality. Poverty is therefore seen as a function of entrenched social and economic inequality, as a result the greatest poverty is to be found where there is the greatest difference in income level and access to resources (Raimi, 2017; Tendler, 2023). The link between social policy and poverty reduction is stressed by these scholars, issues like land redistribution and resource re- allocations are held to be key factors in poverty alleviation. For these scholars, what is needed is the reconstruction of the social order in terms of redistribution of social /economic powers to make room for a fairer and equal control of country's wealth.

On the other hand, the rightists led by Jeffrey Sachs and supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank insists that poverty eradication must center on absolute poverty (Sachs, 2005). This position is predicated on the perception that poor countries are more concerned with basic needs (absolute poverty) than living standard (relative poverty). Moreover, it is believed that poverty eradication under relative poverty in developing nations is harder than absolute poverty. This is because relative poverty takes into account not only income levels but also inequalities in access to resources, opportunities, and social services within a society, making it a more complex and

multidimensional challenge to address. Unwin (2017) opined that what is common in developing nations is absolute poverty as against relative poverty. Based on this rightist idea, supported by the IMF and the World Bank, most attempts towards poverty eradication in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive have been aimed at absolute poverty. The record however is not showing a corresponding success when compared to hopes and commitments.

Historically, poverty alleviation programmes became of greater concern to development experts during the 1980s as a result of the World Bank's decision to invest large amounts on research on the relationships among economic growth, policy and income distribution. This is based on the perception that understanding poverty will enhance a better understanding of what works institutionally in terms of service delivery and what kind of intervention will bring about significant change in people's life.

The results of the various researches initially led to the adoption of "Trickle-Down Model" of poverty alleviation (Fagade, 2019). Investing on the economy for growth is seen as an appropriate way to address poverty problems. This model assumes that as economic activities expand, per capita income increases. This supposedly will bring economic benefits to all members of the society through multiplier effects. Over the years however, it has been observed that despite economic growth in gross national product and per capita income, the disparity in terms of income distribution remained extremely wide, leading to a co-existence of great wealth and great poverty within one society. Poverty increases despite economic growth. This makes it clear that economic growth itself does not reduce poverty. For instance, Nigeria experienced robust economic growth rates averaging around 7% per annum between 2004 and 2014 (World Bank, 2022). However, during this same period, the poverty rate in Nigeria increased from 51.6% in 2004 to 53.5% in 2009, and further to 62.6% in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This disconnect between economic growth and poverty reduction highlights that economic growth alone is not sufficient to alleviate poverty in Nigeria, as the benefits of growth have not trickled down to the poor segments of the population, likely due to issues such as income inequality, lack of access to opportunities, and inadequate social safety nets. Macroeconomic recovery does not necessarily translate into significant social improvement.

In an attempt to address the limitations of trickle-down model a new model was formulated termed "basic human need model". It advocated a holistic approach to poverty alleviation, the so called bottom up approach. Since human needs goes beyond food and shelter, other dimensions of poverty such as lack of access to education, health care, nutrition and so on become part of poverty assessment. It mostly incorporates initiatives that directly empower the poor. In an attempt to do that, a new approach was designed called "a narrow focus approach" (Oni, 2016). This approach aims at tailoring assistance/intervention to the needs of a particular class or sector. This means doing a careful study of the class/sector after which the identified point of intervention will be tackled. In Nigeria, programmes like Better life for rural women, Peoples bank and Family Economic Advancement Program are all reflective of the narrow focus approach. Of recent however, the narrow focus approach seems to have been abandoned while there is a resurgence of a new kind of holistic approach to poverty alleviation. This approach posits that to lift people out of poverty there must be an effective poverty reduction strategy that attacks poverty on all fronts at the same time.

Poverty, according to United Nations entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods (https://www.google.com). Its manifestations comes in different forms such as hunger, malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion and the inability to be involved in decision-making processes. As a scourge capable of rendering the individuals or state powerless and unproductive, governments all over the world have identified it as a problem that requires urgent attention for it reduction or alleviation.

Hence, the successive Nigeria *leaderships* over the years have adopted various interventionist strategies to *tackle* the scourge since her independence in 1960 till date. Well, for the purpose of this study we would examine the strategies from President Olusegun Obasonjo's civilian administrations of 1999. These interventionist strategies include:

a) National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) 2001

National Poverty Eradication Programme was launched in Olusegun Obasanjo administration aiming at addressing the problems of poverty in the country.

b) Special Programme on Food and Security (SPFS) 2002

In 2002, the administration launched another programme known as Special Programme on Food Security in the 36 states of the federation.

c) Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) 2003

In 2003, there was another known as Root and Tuber Expansion Programme launched in 26 states of the federation, all in attempt to address the problems of rural poverty in Nigeria.

With the assumption of late President Yar'Adua in 2007, part of his seven points agenda includes the alleviation of poverty in Nigeria. Unfortunately, he passed on without accomplishing his poverty alleviation vision for Nigeria.

d) Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) 2012

In 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan came up with Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P).Yet, poverty was not alleviated as planned.

e) National Social Investment Office (NSIO) 2015

In 2015, President Mohammadu Buhari administration established National Social Investment Office, aiming at equitable distribution of wealth to the vulnerable across Nigeria including the youth, children and women. The office as the time created additional new programmes to address specific poverty needs in the country. Among these programmes are:

a) N-Power- N-Power was designed to provide young Nigerians with training and education with a take home stipend of thirty thousand naira (#30,000.00) only.
b) Conditional Cash Transfer Programme- This programme was specifically created to enhance the most vulnerable access to cash so as to reduce poverty, increase nutrition and also give room for self-sustainance in the country.
c) Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme- This was also designed as a micro-lending and investment programme targeting at young entrepreneurs. Under this programme, there was provision for cost-free loans to beneficiaries with the aim of reducing business set-up-capital or cost.
d) TraderMoni an arm of GEEP- This was equally designed to provide small loans without collateral to small scale traders or artisans that may not be able to access loans or credit facilities through banks and traditional financial institutions. GEED has two arms, these include 1 MarketMoni and, 2 FarmerMoni. While marketMoni is to be assessed by market people, FarmerMoni is meant for farmers only.
e) Home Grown School Feeding Programme- The Home Grown School Feeding Programme was introduced to increase school enrolment by ensuring that meals are provided for school children especially those in poor and food-in secured regions of the country.

One can bear witness with this article, that despite all the interventionist strategies by successive regimes, Nigeria is still more yoked in her poverty experiences. Notwithstanding, some reasons were advanced for the failures of the listed programmes including:

1) Poor policy framework
2) Duplicating of functions by the implementing agencies
3) Parochial interest of staff members
4) Less commitment on the part of the staff
5) Inappropriate design of programmes
6) Inadequate infrastructure
7) High operation cost
8) Poor budgeting and; lots more
9) Political instability

With all these interventionist strategies adopted by successive leadership to reduce poverty in the country, the scourge is still growing higher by the day. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), the National monetary poverty line shows that 40.1% of the people of Nigeria are poor, and 68% are multidimentionally poor.

In Nigeria, poverty alleviation is reflective of policies and guidelines associated with the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). As mentioned earlier, it aims at poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation and value re-orientation through improving social delivery, empowering the people and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of government. This is borne out of the idea that poverty goes beyond economic and material deprivations, that it includes erosion of good health, ability to exercise ones right of personal dignity and freedom to make economic and political choices. The multi-dimensional approach to poverty alleviation is therefore being reasserted.

Critically however, it should be noted that all the models so far discussed are working with the absolute conceptualization of poverty aiming at reducing the number of people that live below the poverty line ($1.00per person per day). Whereas, it has been argued that the use of such indicators though it gives a simplified picture of poverty that is easy to grasp and tackle but their actual calculation is fraught with difficulty (Unwin, 2017). He further argues that even if it were possible to shift everyone in the world's income above $1.01 a day line, thereby eliminating absolute poverty, this would be an empty victory as we will still have poverty, only maybe a little less. What is needed therefore is to give at least as much emphasis to the factors causing inequality as we do to those generating economic growth. The challenge is to combine both absolute and relative conceptualization of poverty into a new framework that will enable us both to ensure an equitable balance in the allocation of national/global resources, while at the same time delivering the basic needs of the world's poorest people.

Poverty and Environmental Degradation: The Reverse Logic

Studies on poverty and environment have shown that while environmental degradation can enable conditions for poverty, it is also clear that poverty can also lead to environmental degradation (World Bank, 2009, Oguono, 2005, Azaiki, 2003 The cyclic link between poverty and environment is an extremely complex phenomenon. Poverty for instance may foster environmental degradation because the poor, who rely on natural resources more than the rich, deplete natural resources faster as they have no real prospects of gaining access to other types of resources. There is a general consensus in the literature that poverty is a major cause of environmental degradation. For example, in one of the conclusions of the Bruntland Commission Report (1987), which incidentally has been accepted as the blue print for environmental conservation, it was explicitly stated that, poverty is a major cause of environmental problems and amelioration of poverty is a necessary and central condition of any effective programmes addressing the environment. The World Bank joined the above argument when in the 2007 World Development Report, the Bank explicitly stated that, poor families who have to meet short term needs mine the natural capital by excessive cutting of trees for firewood and failure to replace soil nutrients (World Bank, 2019; Raimi, 2019).

However, there has been a rising trend in the economic literature which disputes the conventional theory and argues that simple generalizations of this multi-dimensional problem are erroneous and that a more complex set of variables are in play (Moffat & Linden, 2015). These studies point to demographic, cultural, and institutional factors as important variables in the poverty-environmental degradation nexus. An intricate web of factors plus the existence of feedback loops from environmental degradation to poverty makes the process of identifying causality links, if any, between environmental degradation and poverty a difficult exercise. However, these studies have been few and isolated and it is interesting to note that until recently, there has been very little in-depth coordinated empirical research in the socio-economics of environmental degradation- poverty causality relationships.

The World Bank (2009), reports that poverty in Nigeria has remained steadily on the increase with a significant number of the population being absolutely poor and living in shanty areas and suburbs.

This according to them is a major factor that contributes to environmental degradation since most of the poor people lack the know how to manage their environment properly. In a study conducted in Malaysia, Monticha (2014), discovered that population growth, poverty and the environment are intricately linked. This is because, poverty has the most direct effect on the environment via cropping where poverty influences the household's technology and investment path in intensification of cropping, where there is a land constraint (pressure from population). Poor families Monticha (2014:9) continues, tend to have more children than non-poor ones since the poor rely heavily on their children for old-age and economic support. A high rate of population growth and population density in poor areas can exacerbate the poverty problem (Adeyemi, 2010:53) thereby putting more pressure on the environment. This is exactly what plays out in the study area, Rivers State, in the Niger Delta region.

Theoretical Framework

The Marxist Political Economy Theory

The Marxist Political Economy theory provides a robust lens through which to analyze the intertwined issues of environmental degradation and poverty alleviation in Rivers State. This approach, rooted in Karl Marx's critique of capitalism, emphasizes the intricate linkages between political and economic structures within society. Marx's insights into the exploitation of the masses by a privileged class shed light on how economic systems shape governance practices and societal values. Unlike liberal-pluralist theories, which often overlook these power dynamics, Marxist political economists delve into the role of economic and political systems in perpetuating inequalities.

Central to Marx's analysis is the understanding that economic structures determine the broader social and political landscape. He argued that the mode of production conditions social relations and institutions, including legal, cultural, and political frameworks. While economic structures play a foundational role, Marx also recognized the dialectical interplay between the economic base and the superstructure, where political and ideological forces influence economic relations.

In the context of Rivers State, environmental degradation and poverty are deeply intertwined with the prevailing economic and political systems. The Marxist Political Economy approach suggests that the Nigerian state, driven by the interests of the ruling class, prioritizes policies that serve elite interests over the well-being of the poor masses (Ali-Apkjiak, S.C.A & Pyke, 2003). For example, in the 1970s, the strategies adopted by the Nigerian government to alleviate poverty centered around the provision of basic infrastructural facilities including health, nutritional and educational services for the poor. But in the 1980s, the focused changed to promoting the use of the poor's most abundant asset, which is labour (World Bank 1990).This dynamic is particularly evident in the exploitation of natural resources, such as oil, where multinational corporations operate with minimal regard for environmental preservation and community welfare Ekelegbe, (2006, Asuni, (2009). As a result, environmental laws and regulations are often shaped to protect the interests of the ruling class, perpetuating environmental degradation and exacerbating poverty among marginalized communities.

Methodology

The section captures the methodology employed for the fieldwork and this covers areas such as research design, study population, sample size determination, sampling techniques, data collection sources and instruments, and data analysis methods. The research design adopted is descriptive, enabling the examination of a large number of subjects and providing foundational knowledge for future research endeavours. The study primarily relied on the use of questionnaire and observation, with both primary and secondary data sources being utilized. Rivers State serves as the study area, given its economic prominence in the Nigerian hydrocarbon industry. The state's population growth, cultural richness, and industrial activities provide a significant context for the research. The study population consists of three specific communities within Rivers State, with a sample size of 400 determined using the Taro Yamane formula n=N/(1+N(E)2).

Where n is the sample size,
N signifies the population of the study,
e signifies the margin of error (this could be 0.10, 0.05, 0.01 as the case maybe).

The sampling techniques adopted include cluster sampling; this sampling method enables the researcher due to the size and terrain of the study area to cluster the respondents in a spot for ease of the administration and retrieval of the questionnaires issued. for community selection and quasi-random sampling for household selection. Data collection involves structured questionnaires divided into sections covering socio-demographic information and environment-related data, supplemented by secondary sources such as textbooks and internet resources. The instrument underwent validation through consultations with experts, while reliability was assessed using the test-retest method. Quantitative analysis was employed, with data analyzed descriptively through tables, bar charts and percentages. Limitations encountered during the study include challenges in participant recruitment, financial constraints, time limitations, and scope constraints, which were mitigated to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research objectives.

Results

Respondents of various ages participated in the study. The most common age range was 30-39 followed by 40-49 (see table below). Over 50% of participants were married. It is also important to note also that a large number of the participants/respondents in this study had formal education as the data reveals below. This made it easy for them to fill their questionnaires without problems.

TABLE 1: Respondents' Socio-Demographic data (N=320)

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage %**
Age		
Below 19	20	6.3
20-29	44	13.7
30-39	128	40.0
40-49	80	25.0
50-59	40	12.5
60 and above	8	2.5
Total	**320**	**100**
Sex		
Males	192	60%
Females	128	40%
Total	**320**	**100**
Marital Status		
Single	92	28.7
Married/cohabiting	150	46.9
Separated/divorced	46	14.4
Widow/widower	32	10.0
Total	**320**	**100**

Educational Level		
No formal education	12	3.8
Primary education	20	6.3
Secondary education	44	13.7
Tertiary education	204	63.7
Vocational training	40	12.5
Total	**320**	**100**
Type of Religion		
Christians	212	66.3
Muslims	60	18.7
Traditional	20	6.3
Others	28	8.7
Total	**320**	**100**
Occupation		
Farmer/fisherman	64	20
Petty trader	128	40
Civil servant	56	17.5
Oil company worker	36	11.3
Businessman	24	7.5
Others	12	3.7
Total	**320**	**100**

Source: field work, 2023

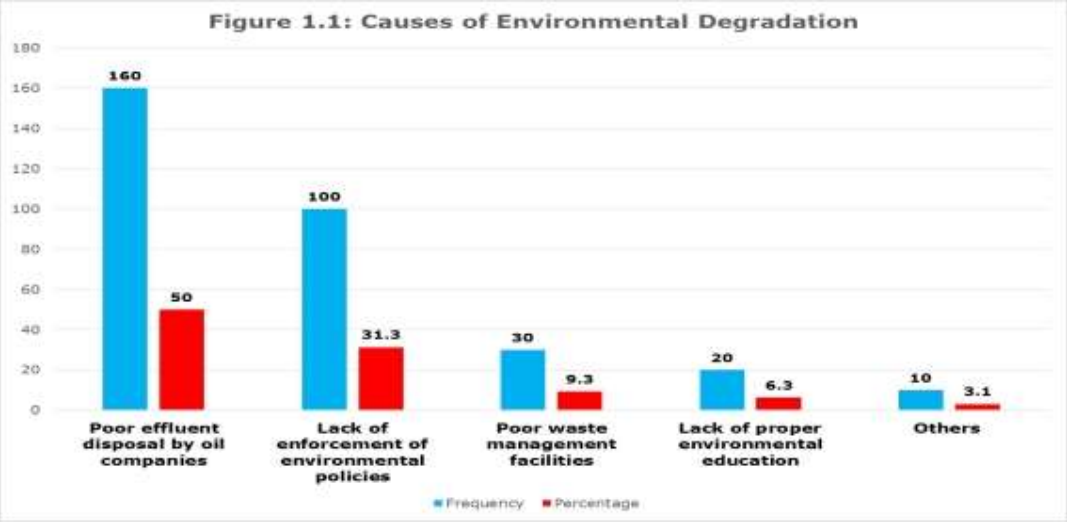
Table 4.1 presents a comprehensive overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The age distribution indicates a diverse range, with 20 individuals (6.3%) below the age of 19, 44 (13.7%) aged between 20 and 29 years, 128 (40%) falling within the 30-39 age bracket, 80 (25%) between 40-49 years, 40 (12.5%) aged 50-59, and 8 (2.5%) aged 60 and above. In terms of gender, the majority of participants were male, comprising 192 individuals (60%), while females accounted for 128 (40%). Marital status varied among respondents, with 92 individuals (28.7%) reporting being single, 150 (46.9%) indicating they were married or cohabiting, 46 (14.4%) stating they were separated or divorced, and 32 (10%) identifying as widows or widowers. Educational attainment ranged from no formal education, reported by 12 respondents (3.8%), to primary education (6.3%), secondary education (13.7%), tertiary education (63.7%), and vocational training (12.5%). Religious affiliation predominantly leaned towards Christianity, with 212 respondents (66.3%), followed by Islam (18.7%), traditional religion (6.3%), and other religions (8.7%). Regarding occupation, the distribution indicates varying lengths of service, with 64 individuals (20%) reporting tenure of less than 10 years, 128 (40%) between 11-19 years, 56 (17.5%) between 20-29 years, 36

(11.3%) between 30-39 years, 24 (7.5%) between 40-49 years, and 12 (3.7%) reporting tenure exceeding 50 years.

Substantive Data

This section deals with a presentation of data on environmental degradation and poverty alleviation in selected communities in Rivers State. This is done following the objectives of the study as presented earlier. It therefore measures issues like the causes and the consequences environmental degradation especially as it affects their poverty alleviation.

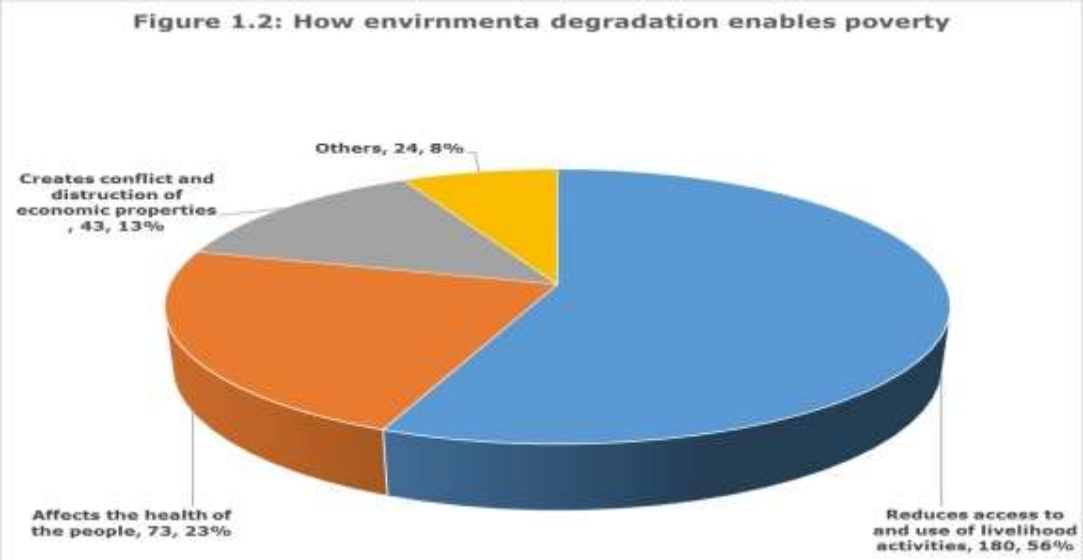
Objective 1: Determine the causes of environmental degradation in selected community in Rivers State.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Figure 1.1 above provides information on the perceived causes of environmental degradation in Port Harcourt. The data reveal that 160(50%) of the respondents say environmental degradation is caused by poor effluent disposal by multinational companies operating in Port Harcourt, 100(31.3%) of the respondents say it is due to the lack of enforcement of environmental policies by state authorities, 30(9.3%) of the respondents say it is caused by poor waste management facilities, 20(6.3%) of the respondents say it is due to lack of proper environmental education, 10(3.1%) say there are other causes.

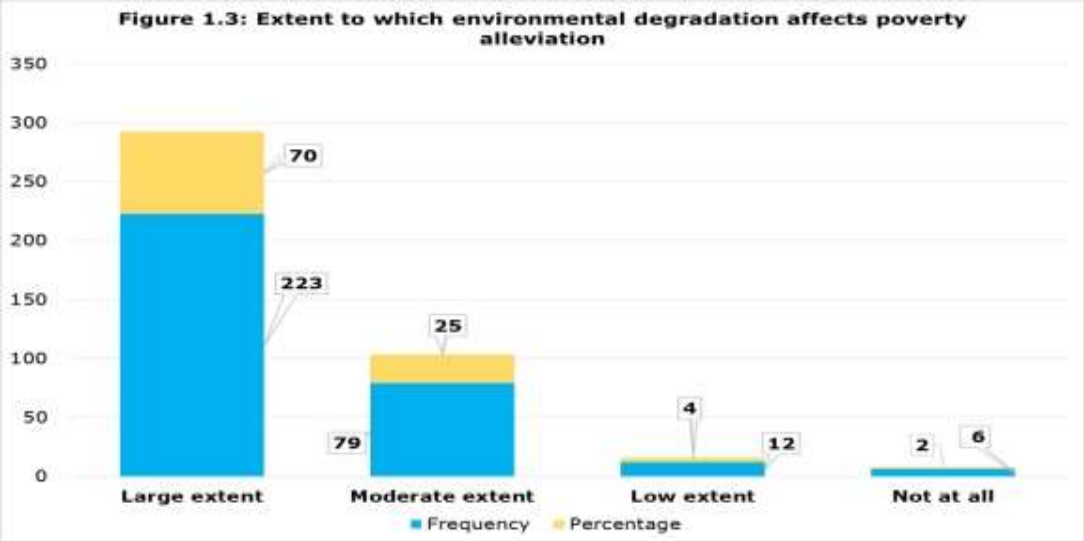
Objective 2: Examine how environmental degradation enables poverty in selected communities in Rivers State.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Figure 1.2 above provides information on how environmental degradation enables poverty in the selected communities. The data reveal that 180(56%) of the respondents environmental degradation reduces their access to and use of livelihood activities in the selected communities, 73(23%) of the respondents it affects their health and makes it impossible for them to go about activities that can alleviate their poverty, 43(13%) of the respondents said it leads to conflict and by extension destruction of economic properties which further exacerbates poverty, it is caused by poor waste management facilities, 24(8%) of the respondents said others.

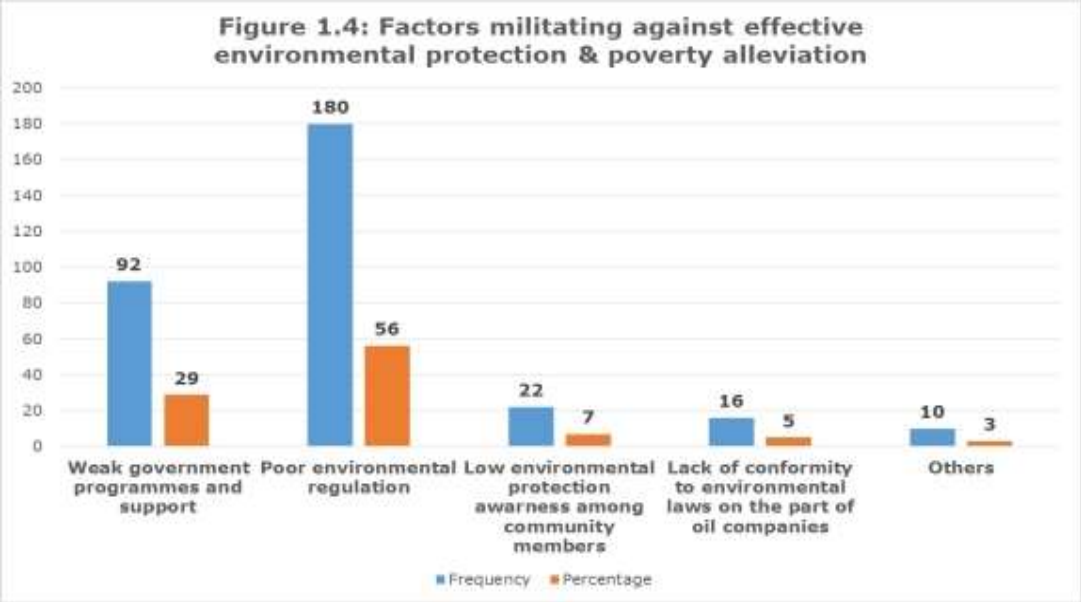
Objective 3: Examine the extent to which environmental degradation affects poverty alleviation attempts in the study area.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Figure 1.3 above provides information on the extent to which environmental degradation affects poverty alleviation in the selected communities. The data reveal that 223(70%) of the respondents said to a large extent, 79(25%) of the respondents said to a moderate extent, 12(4%) of the respondents said low extent, 6(2%) of the respondents said not at all.

Objective 4: Highlight the factors militating against effective environmental protection and poverty alleviation in Rivers State.



Source: Field Survey, 2023

Figure 1.4 above provides information on the factors militating against effective environmental protection and poverty alleviation in the study area. The data reveal that 92(29%) of the respondents said that weak programmes and support from government militate against environmental protection and poverty alleviation, 180(56%) of the respondents said poor environmental regulations by relevant agencies, 22(7%) of the respondents said low environmental protection awareness on the part of the communities, 16(5%) of the respondents said lack of conformity to environmental laws on the part of oil companies, while 10(3%) of the respondents said there are other factors.

Findings

Causes of Environmental Degradation: The study identifies poor effluent disposal by oil multinationals as the primary cause, with 50% of respondents attributing environmental degradation to this factor. Additionally, inadequate enforcement of environmental policies ranks second, with 31% of respondents identifying it as a significant contributor. These findings are consistent with previous research, highlighting the detrimental impact of oil activities and weak regulation.

Environmental Degradation & Poverty: Regarding the relationship between environmental degradation and poverty, the data show that 56% of respondents believe it severely limits access to livelihood systems, exacerbating poverty levels. This underscores the interconnectedness of environmental and economic challenges, emphasizing the importance of addressing environmental degradation as a means of poverty alleviation. Some 45.8 kilowatts of heat are discharged into the atmosphere of the Niger Delta from flaring 1.8 billion cubic feet of gas everyday (https://www.google.com)

Extent to which Environmental Degradation Affects Poverty Alleviation: The study indicates that environmental degradation has a substantial and adverse impact on poverty alleviation efforts, with respondents noting its detrimental effects on previous attempts to address poverty in the area. This

suggests that efforts to alleviate poverty are significantly hampered by ongoing environmental degradation, leading to a cyclical pattern of poverty perpetuation.

Factors Militating Against Effective Environmental Protection and Poverty Alleviation: Factors impeding effective action include poor environmental regulation and weak government support for affected communities. These findings highlight the urgent need for stricter regulation, enhanced enforcement, and proactive government intervention to address environmental degradation and poverty in Rivers State.

Conclusion

The study has established that environmental degradation in selected communities in Rivers State is primarily attributed to poor effluent disposal by oil multinational corporations, exacerbated by inadequate enforcement of environmental policies and a lack of political will to address these issues. Corruption and poverty further compound the problem, allowing environmental degradation to persist unchecked. The high level of awareness among respondents regarding the environmental degradation resulting from oil production highlights the urgency of addressing these issues to promote sustainable livelihoods in the region. The study concludes that poverty in the area stems from a complex interplay of factors, including environmental degradation, lack of political will, and corruption, which are deeply entrenched within capitalist social relations. Furthermore, the study reveals a significant link between environmental degradation and poverty, as the destruction of natural ecosystems by oil corporations restricts people's access to vital resources, thereby exacerbating poverty levels. Despite the existence of environmental management policies in Nigeria, their effectiveness is hampered by inadequate enforcement, undermining their potential to mitigate environmental degradation and alleviate poverty

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion, the following recommendations are made.

i. The success of poverty alleviation initiatives in the selected communities and the state in general will be guaranteed if the unequal exchange relationship is balanced. In this regard, the Nigerian State and multinational oil companies can promote sustainable livelihood through better poverty alleviation programmes in the country if they collectively agree to put the people of at the centre of their priorities.
ii. The government should devise a workable environmental policy that would regulate oil operations in Rivers State. Setting up of environmental agencies is not enough. Effective machinery should be put in place for strict enforcement of such laws. In addition, multinational oil companies should be made to become more responsible to the local people in their operations. Government should not compromise the welfare and survival of its citizens because of its profit-motivated partnership with the oil companies.
iii. There is also need for a sustainable partnership framework (SPF) that recognizes the role of communities should be put in place as this can go a long way to help in the resolution of environment-related problems, this should be backed up by EIA studies, surveillance of oil pipelines and other oil facilities, the management of spills (both of catastrophic and local dimensions), information management, etc. The adoption of the SPF will help significantly in reducing oil-induced environmental diseconomies in the state, including second-round consequences that undermine poverty alleviation attempts.

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