



Forced Migration In The Niger Delta Region Of Nigeria: Interrogating The Role Of Oil Induced Environmental Degradation

¹Boroh, Stanley Ebitare & ²Prof. Stephen Okodudu

Department of Sociology,
University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
¹ stanleyboroh@gmail.com Tel; 07032253224
² steveokodudu@yahoo.com Tel; 08033107581

ABSTRACT

The challenges associated with oil induced environmental degradation are enormous and have been noted to impact the socio-economic life of people. In Nigeria for instance, the issue of environmental degradation, especially the oil pollution variant, has impacted significantly on the livelihoods of people in the Niger Delta region where the petroleum industry is nested. Whether the nature of the degradation is on water, land or air, the fact remains that human beings continue to suffer the impact. Given this, this study sets out to examine how forced migration in the Niger Delta region is enabled by oil-induced environmental degradation. The study looks at the impacts of oil-induced environmental degradation in petroleum host communities and the conditions and processes that force people to migrate in the face of oil-induced environmental degradation. Hence, relying on a survey method involving 4 communities and 88 participants from Bayelsa and Delta state, selected through a mixed sampling technique, the study found among other things that environmental degradation leads to occupational migration in the selected states. These findings can be explained in the context of the ‘Push-Pull’ theory of migration. The study thus recommends that the Nigerian state at all levels should develop social security for migrants, and ensure the enforcement of laws that protect the environment and the livelihoods of citizens.

Keywords: Forced migration, Niger Delta, oil-induced, environmental degradation.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of environmental degradation has continued to remain topical in the policy and academic circles and this is mostly because of its persistence despite several outcries. While there are numerous debates on the subject matter of environmental degradation, the role of human activities in causing as well as exacerbating the problem has been firmly established (Claude, 2018). Whether the nature of the degradation is on water, land or air, the fact remains that human beings continue to suffer the impact, especially on their livelihoods. The adverse effect on the livelihood system of people resulting from the degradation of the environment does not have a geographical boundary as different societies tend to contend with different kinds of degradation globally. For instance, the World Health Organization (2017), reported that globally, over 82% of the world’s population are affected by one form of environmental degradation or the other and a significant part of this figure reside in rural areas with little or no technical skills to manage such problems. This position by the World Health Organization brings to mind the growing concern in development literature on the issue of coping mechanisms with regard to ecological problems by mostly vulnerable groups in rural communities.

In Nigeria for instance, the issue of environmental degradation especially the oil pollution variant has continued to attract significant concern especially in the Niger Delta region where the petroleum industry is nested. This concern has attracted commentaries from mostly international human rights groups such as Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth, and Transparency International among others. These groups along with several academics share their discontent for how International Oil Corporations (IOCs) operating in the Niger Delta region have grossly undermined the environment of their host communities through gas flaring and oil spills (Opukri and Ibaba, 2008; Adeyemi, 2015; Jack, 2019). The most troubling aspect of this problem is the fact that oil-induced environmental degradation which mostly comes from gas flaring and crude oil spills destroys the livelihoods of the Niger Delta people. The negative effects often manifest in low fish and farm yields since most of them are fishers and farmers.

The reality of oil-induced environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region is becoming a major concern as members of petroleum host communities who rely on environmental resources for livelihoods now have to develop strategies to survive the adverse impacts of oil exploitation. The literature on coping strategy is beginning to expand with the understanding that human beings are gifted with the innate capabilities to manage change. This notwithstanding, concern over the deleterious impact of oil-induced environmental degradation has now turned to the understanding of forced migration from highly impacted communities in addition to how others who are unable to move can adapt to the associated adverse livelihood impacts. However, while it is not in itself the sole trigger of forced migration, changes associated with oil-induced environmental degradation are most likely to exacerbate gradual processes of migration as well as an increase in the frequency and intensity of food scarcity in the region. These, in turn, predispose human populations to precarious situations that might necessitate out-migration. In line with this, Fakunle (2017), thinks that the type, severity and reversibility of specific kinds of environmental degradation influences and or determines the kind of coping mechanisms that people use. For instance, mild or what has been referred to as short impact environmental degradation (Adeyemi, 2015); generate coping mechanisms that keep people closer to their communities, while long and sustained impact environmental degradation drive people out of their livelihood in search of greener pastures elsewhere. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the role of oil induced environmental degradation in driving forced migration in selected states of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

- i. Examine the impacts of oil induced environmental degradation in petroleum host communities;
- ii. Examine the conditions and processes that force people to migrate in the face of oil-induced environmental degradation.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the impacts of oil induced environmental degradation in petroleum host communities?
- ii. What factors and processes influence the decision to migrate in the face of oil induced environmental degradation?

Literature Review

The issue of oil exploration and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region has continued to occupy foreign and indigenous scholars for quite some time now. This is because the problem continues to persist over the years despite scholarly concerns. The history of oil production in Nigeria and especially in the Niger Delta region has been well documented. In fact, due to its central role as the economic mainstay of Nigeria and given its attraction for multi-disciplinary inquiry, crude oil production seems to have caught the fancy of more scholars than any other sector in the Niger Delta. Perhaps this is why Makinwa (2011) thinks that since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in the 1950s and the subsequent displacement of agriculture in the economic hierarchy of Nigeria, the petroleum industry has called up a massive concern with social, economic and environmental discussions topping the chart in this regard. Interestingly, several scholars (See; Okaba, 2005, Adeyemi, 2010 & Fakunle, 2017) seem to

converge on the understanding that environmental degradation is by far the most disturbing challenge associated with the petroleum industry, especially because it is even an enabler of social and economic problems in the Niger Delta region and the country at large.

The effect of crude oil extraction over the last 60 years in oil-bearing communities in Nigeria has been disastrous because it does not only affect their physical environment but rather threatens the traditional economy and livelihood of the people (Slack, 2016). It is important to note that despite the negative socio-economic and environmental problems caused by the production of oil in these communities, the Nigerian state has been a major benefactor not minding problems being encountered by people in the region. A careful probe of the situation shows it has a unique pattern that oil exploration operates on in the Niger Delta region. Firstly, though in different degrees, all aspects of oil exploration affect the environment negatively. Secondly, oftentimes all of the parts of what make up the environment are affected in a single operational line. Thirdly, the impacts of the different aspects of the extraction of crude oil as it relates to the environment are reinforcing rather than being mutually exclusive. Fourthly, the consequence arising from the activities of oil exploration has economic effects on the people because the source of their livelihoods has been affected. Lastly, social tensions tend to arise as a result of the damage caused by oil operations, the host communities seek compensation and often, this leads to disagreement if not properly managed. Below, the sources of oil-induced environmental degradation are discussed.

The issues of environmental degradation and migration are gradually taking the centre stage in regional and global development discourse as they are both known to have socioeconomic and human development consequences. Migration induced by environmental degradation is not a novel phenomenon as the consequences it portends on human communities are left to be undesired. For instance, the indigenous people of the Savannah of West Africa are known to be faced with diverse environmental challenges especially those arising from climate change. Studies have shown that human mobility is a central adaptive strategy that fishermen, farmers and pastoralists rely on and it is an omnipresent characteristic of the livelihoods and culture of the people (VanDer Geest, 2011). Environmental degradation and the issue of migration are mutually reinforcing as the change in the natural environment leading to degradation might either force people to make migratory decisions. This is evident in the social, economic, and cultural deficits which accompany environmental degradation including shortage of farm and aquatic resources, health challenges amongst others (IPCC, 2007).

Theoretically, the environment-migration nexus has been explored by scholars with an emphasis on the fact that communities that depend on their local environment for survival are faced with environmental challenges mainly caused by the actions and inactions of man. They are likely to migrate to an environment with less challenge, since their means of survival has been truncated. Families that are predisposed to such situations may tactically look for alternative means for survival and migration is one of such means to places where they can get other means to survive since their local economy has already been destroyed as a result of environmental degradation (Abdelali-Marini et al., 2003; Bilsborrow, 2002). Suffice it to say that several studies have shown that there is a relationship among access to land, loss of traditional means of livelihood and migration across continents mostly in South and Central America, Africa and Asia. Migration in itself can be seen as a coping mechanism in the face of harsh environmental conditions. Several studies have argued that abrupt environmental cases are the major catalyst to temporary migration from such places (Raleigh et al., 2008; Myers et al., 2008).

More so, it is pertinent to state that the interface between environmental degradation and migration is not lineal or directional. Human communities do not migrate immediately after incidences of environmental degradation, rather environmental change acts as a secondary driver of migration as it poses the potential to compromise household security (economic productivity), exposure to diseases, etc. (Meze-Hauksen, 2000). Buttressing this position, other scholars have suggested that there exist a strong nexus between migrants' intentions to move with other socio-demographic factors like age, gender, occupation, education, household status, social network amongst other variables (Abu, Codjoe & Sward, 2013:1, Carr, 2005). In addition, others have viewed migration to be an adaptation in the face of harsh environmental conditions (Yaro, 2006:61).

Theoretical Framework (The Push-Pull Theory)

This study adopts the Push-Pull theory of migration which was propounded by Everett Lee in the year 1966. Since, Everett's submissions, the theory has undergone significant modifications and improvements. In this regard, the contributions of Lee (1966) to the expansion of the theory cannot be overemphasized and this is because he outlined four items that affect migration. This is the main reason why the push-pull theory is still regarded as one of the most potent frameworks when discussing migration studies. The theory of migration associated with Lee and the outlined four factors that define how people move from one place to another are as follows: Origin, arrival point, intervening challenges and individual ideology.

At the home and destination, different factors interplay and act as an attractive force to pull people and some act as push factors to make them leave their place of origin, but this varies across households and individuals whose migration processes are determined by various experiences. Several reasons are put into consideration when making the decision to migrate and this can include the incentives from both home and destination. If the push factor is not strong enough households might not migrate, but all intervening variables play a key role as well as individuals' experiences in terms of migrating. Lee's push-pull theory has been one of the most used theories when it comes to migration issues and this is because the terms developed are still relevant in today's world and it cuts across several disciplines.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the socio-ecological system of the Niger Delta has over the decades experienced severe degradation of the environment ranging from oil spillages, gas flaring and deforestation as a result of the activities of the oil and gas industry domiciled in the region. The pervasive environmental degradation has negative impacts not only on the environment of the region, but it also affects their social, health, economic as well as the development of the region which could necessitate migratory responses from individuals and households.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was anchored on the cross-sectional design. The location of the study is the Niger Delta which Awosika (1995) noted is found within the Atlantic coast of the Southern part of Nigeria. The study was conducted in two of the core states in the Niger Delta namely; Delta and Bayelsa states. These states were selected because they play host to a good number of oil infrastructure and are hard hit in terms of oil-induced environmental degradation. In each of these states two oil impacted communities were purposively selected to be part of the study. For Delta State, Okpai and Benikrukru were selected while Ikarama and Emadike were selected for Bayelsa State. The total population of these areas put together is 21,638 (NPC, 2006). This therefore cumulatively puts the total population of the study at twenty one thousand, six hundred and thirty eight (21, 638). The sample size for the study is 48 persons purposively selected from the different communities in the area of study. One person from each category of the community governance structure ranging from Community Chiefs, Women Leaders, Youth Leaders, Community Development Committee (CDC) members, Community Based Organizations (CBO), and Opinion Leaders was interviewed making it a total of 6 KPIS per community culminating into 24 interviews across the 4 communities. Also there was an FGD of 6 persons per community making it a total of 24 which now puts the sample size at 48. These groups of persons were chosen because the researcher deemed it fit for them to have requisite information about the subject matter of investigation owing to their position as leaders in their communities. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the study makes it imperative to utilize a mixture of non-probability and probability techniques in a multi-stage sampling process. Firstly, two states namely Delta, and Bayelsa were selected purposively from the Niger Delta region because these states represent one the most impacted areas by oil and gas exploration in the region (Raji & Ajibade, 2013). Secondly, at the state level, two oil impacted communities were purposively selected from each of the two states to be included in the study culminating in four communities across the two states. Lastly, at the level of the community, the cluster sampling technique was utilized to categorize community members into diverse cluster groups according to their socio-demographic features such as youth groups, women groups, fishermen groups, farmers groups, and community governance structure such as community chiefs, community development committee amongst

others. The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were generated from the field survey using interviews and FGDs in the selected communities. In addition, this was complemented with secondary data that was sourced from existing literature such as articles in journals, textbooks as well as internet materials. Participatory data collection instruments were employed such as Key Persons Interviews (KPIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and observational techniques. For the data analysis, qualitative techniques were utilized. Qualitative data obtained from respondents through the KPIs and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed using the thematic analysis technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Impacts of oil-induced environmental degradation in host communities

The issue surrounding oil-induced environmental degradation and its impact on host communities was discussed extensively amongst key informants and focus group discussants. While it is easy to say without a doubt, that participants had a clear grasp of the causes of oil-induced environmental degradation, they nevertheless expressed different but related opinions about its impact on their various communities. What is perhaps very striking, is the fact that most of the participants or interviewees converge on the understanding that oil-induced environmental degradation has been largely detrimental to the traditional livelihood system. In all, the adverse economic effects of oil-induced environmental degradation stand at the nucleus of the discussion around impacts when the various interviews are taken into consideration. For instance, one of the interviewees shared the following opinion about the impacts of oil-induced environmental degradation in his community:

Economically, the Ikarama people have been greatly affected as the selling of fish and periwinkle is our major source of income as there is no job opportunities and we use this to feed our families apart from a few persons who teach in the schools. Feeding becomes a problem when there is a spillage and people complain bitterly about money. An instance is when we needed to raise money to get materials for protection against the corona virus and we couldn't get the needed materials because there was no money (*Male/aged 42 years/KPI participant/ Ikarama, Bayelsa State/2021*).

The above submission by one of the KPI participants suggests some kind of pattern that defines the economic problems imposed on the community as a result of oil-induced environmental degradation. It is easy to see that the onset of the adverse impacts revolves around people losing the natural rights to traditional livelihoods that ordinarily were made possible by the original state of the natural environment. This points to fundamental economic displacement that assumes the form of a formative survival challenge. Progressively, this formative impact metamorphoses into another layer of economic problem where members of communities are not able to have access to money for other things because the fundamental economic activities (fishing, farming among others) that put money in their hands have been undermined. It is in this light that another of the interviewees expressed the following views:

Ikarama people are majorly fishermen. Fishing is our livelihood and generally, oil has not impacted positively on us, before the oil came, fish was in abundant supply in Ikarama, but recently it is difficult to even have fish to feed on. As a youth, the only other means to use and support yourself when there is no work to do is to go fishing, but now that fishing is no longer viable our youth have taken to sea piracy as a means of survival (*Male, aged 57 years, KPI participant, Ikarama, Bayelsa State, 2020*).

Another KPI participant from Benikrukru community in Delta State, who is a former Chairman of the Ijaw Youth Council shared a similar opinion about the impact or effect of oil production activities in their community. According to him:

The situation is terrible because it has affected the fishing system. It has contributed nothing but pains to the community. Culturally our religion is

always connected to mammon worship and most of our religious inclinations are connected to marine worship because of lack of sand bank in the river, so cultural festivals are now being done outside its original place. You see that the intricacies and value system of that cultural activity is gradually eroding. Environmental degradation is gradually distorting our history and our cultural activities. It has affected the fishing system. Fishing activity has totally died down in the community

(Male, aged 34 years, KPI participant, Benikrukru, Delta State. 2020).



Plate 1: Picture showing Oil Spillage in Benikrukru Community

Source: Fieldwork, 2020

The adverse impact of the oil and gas industry on host communities where this study was conducted did not just resonate with the KPI participants alone. Those who took part in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) also shared similar opinion. This clearly suggests a consensus among the respondents concerning the nature and the extent of the impact of oil and gas production activities in their various communities. One of the FGDs expressed the following opinion:

The oil is damaging our water, destroying all our fishes and periwinkle. The big tree we used to relax under has also been destroyed by the oil. People who engage in periwinkle fishing now go to distance communities before they can get periwinkle. Farmers are also suffering from the oil spill because the soil has been affected causing crops not to grow. The oil spill has destroyed so many things that are too numerous to mention

(Female/ 42 years/FGD Participant/Benikrukru, Delta State, 2020).

It is clear from the narrations of the interviewees that the economic impact of the oil and gas industry is a major concern for them. Most of the interviewees provided their responses with a serious sense of disconcertment and that showed how worrisome the issue is to them. Interestingly, there is a sense of understanding among the interviewees, especially those who took part in the FGD concerning the fact that their natural livelihood system which consists mostly of fishing and farming has been severely eroded. Some of them believe that even fishes have equally found a need to migrate out of the waters in their communities. For instance, a male respondent, along with other FGD participants expressed the view that before now, fishermen and women do not go to other communities to fish. This is because they only need to cast their nets by the waterside in Benikrukru, a community in Delta State, and they will catch fish and crayfish. However, presently those fishes are not accessible anymore. Interestingly, they share the opinion

that now whenever they cast nets in similar places as they used to before, they only get back black nets full of crude.

In the face of these economic challenges imposed by oil-induced environmental degradation, a significant number of people in host communities have lost their original means of livelihood. What is even troubling, is the spate at which this has increased the youth involvement in other illicit socio-economic activities in order to eke out a living. This unhealthy diversification of economic activities imposed by the degradation of natural ecosystems as a result of petroleum production, creates conditions where youths now turn from genuine economic activities to illicit ones, such as oil bunkering and sea piracy. The President of the Ikarama Community Development Association had this to say:

The pollution has affected mostly the youths as they resort to other areas for survival, some involve in illegal refinery or carrying weapons in doing criminal activities and some have become tools for the politicians to recruit during political activities as thugs and are dumped after they have been used and they fall back to the society to commit more crimes, but they see it as a means of survival. The JTF on the river, come into the community and impregnate the young girls and leave them to fend for themselves (*Male/aged 54 years/KPI participant/ Ikarama, Bayelsa State, 2020*).

Apart from the issue of livelihood or economic impacts of the oil and gas industry in the host communities, interviewees also raised significant concern on how related production activities and the adverse outcomes associated with them have undermined the way of life of the people. In other words, there is the widespread belief that oil and gas production activities have also affected cultural and other social practices negatively in these communities. In line with this, one of the interviewees who is an environmental justice advocate shared the following opinion: () “cultural heritage has been destroyed, the people no longer have festivals and ceremonies like they used to (*Male/ aged 38 years/KPI participant/ Ikarama, 2020*)”.

In similar vein, another participant who is a Youth President adduced that:

Politically we are backward and not carried along there because our sons and daughters are not there politically. Social life is down because there is no development. There are some factors that enable social life such as high institutions, tourist sites, cinemas, eateries etc. that is lacking in the community as such there is no form of relaxation or leisure, even the swimming we use in relaxing can hardly be done due to pollution that has destroyed our waters. Hence, when everyone had access to fishing there was a level of self-reliance and less crime, but now people do all kinds of evil things because they need to eat. We used to have a way which cultural heritage on Ikarama, there was the Okordia Izu Festival in October (Yearly) but now it has been a thing of the past because everyone now struggles to focus on how to get to leadership position in the community. Our people now look at getting money from them which they don't even get at the end of the day and we cheated, many analyzed and maligned. (*Male, aged 34 years/KPI participant/Ikarama, 2020*).

The political dimension was also supported by another participant who expressed concern over an established behaviour around tussle for community power or leadership. This he said has changed the power dynamics of the various communities to the extent that people now go to the length of killing because of minor leadership positions, knowing that this position gives them some kind of proximity to

the oil companies and by extension an economic lifeline. One of the interviewees and a Paramount Ruler of Ikarama community stressed that apart from the economic challenges, politically, people now struggle to get to leadership positions as this gives them access to oil companies. Also, the oil companies play politics with us through divide and rule because they will tell us one thing and do another. When there is a spill like that, a company like SPDC calls contractors for clean-up and pay some boys to burn up the place, get caterpillar to clear the burnt places so it is now like a lake.

From the above presentations so far, it is easy to see that a good number of the impacts expressed by the interviewees are negative ones. This is perhaps because the bad impacts actually outweigh the good ones in the eyes or opinion of the community members. This view is largely justified when we consider the underlying or fundamental challenge that the communities now face. The challenge of gradually losing their traditional livelihoods without any form of alternative and amidst other disincentives that undermine the traditional cultural, political and social practices of the people which can be very difficult to bear. It is perhaps within the domain of their inability to bear this multitude of adverse outcomes occasioned by oil-induced environmental degradation that we can better appreciate the initial push factors for out-migration in these communities. Hence, the factors necessitating migration from the host communities are discussed under the next theme below:

Theme 2: Factors that influence decision to migrate in host communities

There is the understanding that man is by nature an economic being. Hence, wherever there is an attraction for economic stability, man naturally gravitates towards such places. This is better appreciated when the push and pull perspective of migration is clearly understood. In this regard, factors that make economic life unhealthy in one location constitute push conditions, while those that represent economic attraction in other places outside the original settlement of individuals now begin to serve as pull factors. These polar factors constitute some kind of economic thug-of-war where the most powerful factor wins. Usually, the economically healthy location turns out victorious as more people eventually move in search of greener pastures.

The outcome of the interview sessions on the factors that push people out of their communities in the face of oil-induced environmental degradation was quite revealing. Most of the interviewees converge on the knowledge that the damage of their natural environment and the associated destruction of traditional livelihoods such as fishing, farming and hunting activities constitute major push factors when it comes to migration. There is the understanding among interviewees that most people migrate because their livelihood activities have been affected adversely and the need to survive pushes them out of their communities to neighbouring ones usually nearby cities. According to one of the KPI participants:

More than 70% of the Benikrukru people live outside and only come home during the festive periods. This is because they do not have any economic reason to stay in the village. However, most of us that stayed back are teachers, young secondary school graduates that teach in private schools, security at the health centre and some labourers at the school building, the rest leave, as there is nothing to do
(Female/aged 39 years/KPI participant/Benikrukru, Delta State, 2020).

In light of this, most of the participants believe that in the pre oil-induced environmental degradation period, people were contented with staying in their various communities. However, with the massive environmental degradation and the destruction of the traditional livelihoods of the people, they find no need to remain behind in the village again since doing so will amount to economic suicide. In line with this thought, one of the participants shared the following view:

Before, when there was no much oil exploration, people were content with staying in Ikarama and going to work from there and the community was fairly populated. Civil servants that worked in far places also came back home for holidays or when on leave to rest. But currently people have left the community and are unwilling to come back in its present state due to the oil spillages which have generated crime, insecurity and shortage of traditional livelihoods. People stay away because they don't have any other choice. Some only stay because if they leave, they do not have somewhere to

go, so they stay and endure whatever challenges they face. Some go into the deep sea to fish which was not so before the problem of oil spillages, before now just by the river shores you catch fishes. The positive side to the migration is that when these young people leave, some of them enrol in programmes to become better than what they would have been if they had stayed back

(Male/aged 57 years/KPI participant/ Ikarama, Bayelsa State, 2020).

Derived from the above, is the fact that migration is fundamentally enabled or engendered by the sustained destruction of the traditional livelihoods of the people. Hence, in the absence of alternative means to eke out a decent living, most people who do not want to partake in illicit economic activities such as sea piracy and oil theft, find themselves face-to-face with a push condition that necessitates the urge to leave. In this regard, adverse economic conditions that emerged out of the deleterious effects of the oil and gas industry activities becomes the fundamental driver of out-migration in the study areas. Some of the KII participants contend that:

People migrate because what they used to sustain themselves is no more, especially the youths, since there are no more fishes to harvest, sell and survive with. They leave to look for ways to survive. I stay because I am a teacher and government pays me, I have something doing, if not I would not be here

(Female/aged 42 years/ KPI participant/Ikarama, Bayelsa State, 2020).

Interestingly, among the many negative outcomes of the oil and gas industry, oil spillage was largely indicted for being one of the most portent drivers of economic damages in most communities. Hence, a good number of the interviewees from Delta and other parts of Bayelsa States see oil spillage as a major source of the problem. One of the participants had this to say:

Being an environmental justice advocate, I have come in direct contact with so many evils in my community. However, on the issue of migration, I would say that the rate of migration increased after the oil exploration because the Emadike people needed to move to places where they can carry-out fishing activities. People migrated because there was almost nothing to live on after several oil spillages. Some left, because they find it difficult to adapt to the changes and others stayed back because they could cope with the changes

(Male, aged 47 years/KPI participant/ Emadike, Bayelsa State, 2020).

The above position resonates with that of several participants from mostly Emadike community in Bayelsa State. For instance, two other participants corroborated this position by agreeing that people tend to leave the villages due to the damages to their farmlands as well as their fishing turfs, by massive oil spillages from the activities of oil companies. To them, the oil spillages made it difficult to have a good harvest from their farms. Hence, the need to leave in search of greener pastures. One of them clearly stressed the point that the oil spillages are responsible for the migration of people and that she and her husband left for Cameroon because there was nothing left for us to feed on. (Female/ aged 50 years/KPI participant/Emadike, Bayelsa State). In support of this, Ozikiri Frederick (a KPI participant from Emadike, Bayelsa State), adduced that people leave because when their means of survival is damaged, one will definitely look for another source. So, people go to other communities where there is no oil spill and other environmental problems associated with the oil and gas industry.

However, to give justification to the pull side of the push and pull theory of migration, social ties or network in the receiving society (where people chose to migrate to), plays a very significant role in the migration equation. In other words, people who migrate more are those who have some kind of social lifeline in the places that they chose to migrate to. From the outcome of the interviews, those with family members outside their communities and especially in nearby cities are more likely to move than those

without any family member or friend in such places. The discussion with some of the interviewees is presented below:

Family ties or other strong social network is a major force in the decision to leave. For instance, those with large families in the community may find it difficult to leave, while those with smaller families who have relatives in nearby cities are quick to migrate when their traditional means of survival is threatened. In addition, people who have money find it easy to leave to new places. Also some of them have people in the places they migrate to either family or friends. Others stayed back because its either they could survive or have attachment to the community, while for some because they do not have cash or relatives, they tend to stay back. Finally, it also boils down to individual differences. Yes, a lot, because people consider how to cater for families, for instance a single man is likely to leave than a married person (*Male/aged 43 years/KPI participant/Benikrukru, Delta State, 2020*).

One of the participants actually captured the essence or basic assumption of the push and pull theory in his narrative in the simplest form. By putting side by side the underlying challenges faced by those who decide to migrate from home and the factors that pull them towards other places; he clearly demonstrated how the theory works. According to him:

When the oil spills occur, people leave that place because the smell is not just offensive, but also harmful, it also has health effects as people begin to manifest illnesses such as coughing and skin problems. In addition to this, some persons face severe destruction of their means of livelihood and cannot do anything again, so they leave. However, before they leave, they must have friends or relations in their new destination. Others stay because they do not have where to stay if they migrate and some will rather say it is better to die in my land than to die in another man's land. So, you see, two things are involved for migration to happen. These are, 1) people's livelihoods are destroyed by oil and gas degradation especially oil spills and 2) people with family members or friends somewhere else find it easy to leave (*Male./aged 67 years/KPI participant/ Emadike, Bayelsa State, 2020*).

Although economic factor stands out as the most powerful driver of migration in the study area, there are cultural dimensions to the problem. While this may not be a strong reason to leave, some of the participants decried the erosion of their cultural values due to the activities of the oil and gas industry in the communities. Most of the participants argued that people do not want to migrate out of somewhere they have spent all of their lives, However, watching their values eroding before them becomes problematic. This notwithstanding, it is the potency of economic factor that drives migration. One of the interviewees expressed the following opinion:

I am the village head of the community and chairman village council of Benikrukru community. The oil exploration has affected our means of livelihood; we can no longer carry out business and even cater for our children. Since the spillages, there has migration out of the community because people needed to survive. Our culture has also been affected because we cannot gather together like we used to because of the problem everywhere and people are busy looking for means of survival. People left because there was no means of survival and some stayed because they could not leave and they decided in their hearts, to remain no matter how bad things turn out to be (*Male/aged 62 years/KPI participant/Benikrukru, Delta State, 2020*).

While people migrate to so many places when they leave their communities, this tends to depend on the social networks that migrants have in targeted destinations. However, there is also the calculated attempt to go to nearby cities where migrants have established social contact. Usually, nearby cities for those in Bayelsa would mean Yenagoa or Port Harcourt and those in Delta State migrate to Warri or Port Harcourt. This notwithstanding, people migrate to wherever they know they have someone to provide the initial support that they require to get back on their economic feet.

FINDINGS

The discussion of findings in this section is done based on the objectives of the study. The reason for this is to ensure the findings are benchmarked against related objectives to show whether the latter have been met or not. Based on this, the findings are presented below.

The first finding in this study was presented under the theme 'impacts of oil-induced environmental degradation in host communities and this was aimed at addressing objective 1 which is to examine the impacts of oil-induced environmental degradation in petroleum host communities. Following the presentation and analysis of the various interviews conducted with participants in the different study areas, the major outcome led to the finding that the most talked-about oil-induced environmental degradation comes in the form of oil spillages and this affects the traditional livelihood system of the people. This livelihood system covers traditional economic activities such as fishing, farming, hunting and others. Interestingly, following the narration of the participants, the study established the fact that oil-induced environmental degradation largely destroys these traditional activities making it difficult for the people to get out a substantial amount of harvest that is required for their daily sustenance. The result is that people become increasingly poor since they cannot produce from their traditional activities and cannot also get a decent alternative economic activity without necessarily getting involved in illicit socio-economic activities such as sea piracy, oil bunkering and the rest. The destruction of the local economy of the people as a result of oil-induced environmental degradation corroborates several previous studies such as Abah (2004); Ibaba (2005); Fakunle (2017); Jack (2019). All of these studies have proven that the activities associated with the oil and gas industry which are mostly carried out by multinational companies have deleterious effects on the traditional livelihood activities of the host communities. These findings also established the fact that the adverse impacts of the oil and gas industry on the livelihoods of the people make it almost impossible for the people to survive in a sustainable manner (Fakunle, 2017). As a result of this, it is safe to submit that while the impacts of the oil-induced environmental degradation caused mostly by oil spillages are numerous, the most devastating of such impacts is the destruction of the traditional economic activities of the people especially fishing and farming.

The second finding was presented under theme 2 above and it clearly relates to objective 2 which is to examine the conditions and processes that influence the decision to migrate in the face of oil-induced environmental degradation. In light of the interview excerpts presented and analyzed under theme 2 above, the study found that the most dominant condition that gives rise to decisions to migrate from host communities is the inability of most members of the communities to have sustained access to a viable livelihood activity. In other words, most persons who decide to migrate do so because they have lost their sole means of livelihood making it difficult to survive. This finding is strongly linked to the first one and this is because, as the livelihoods of the people face depletion and ultimately destruction as a result of the oil-induced environmental degradation, the most affected people find it worthwhile to leave in search of alternative livelihoods in nearby cities, instead of wallowing in poverty (Ekpenyong, et al., 2012; Raimi, 2017) and hunger in their various communities. However, this result is mediated by another factor and this is the issue of a strong social network in the intended destinations of the migrants. In other words, the study also found that apart from the inability of people in oil-induced degraded environments to meet their daily livelihood needs, social ties to family members and friends in the cities and other places outside one's community also plays a very significant role in the decision to migrate. These findings corroborate that of Hugo (2003) and Fagade (2017), who both contend that those who migrate from environmentally degraded settings often do so as a result of some underlying economic reasons and in

most cases, they leave when they know that they can no longer sustain themselves and their family members.

CONCLUSION

As a way of expanding the frontiers of knowledge, this study looked at how migrant households in the Niger Delta region cope in the face of oil-induced environmental degradation. Hence, drawing from the findings, the study concludes that in the face of these economic challenges imposed by oil-induced environmental degradation, a significant number of people in host communities have lost their original means of livelihood. Apart from the issue of livelihood or economic impacts of the oil and gas industry in the host communities, it is the submission of this study that oil and gas production activities and the adverse outcomes associated with them have undermined the way of life of the people. In other words, there is the widespread belief that oil and gas production activities have also affected cultural and other social practices negatively in these communities.

Consequently, all the factors that make economic life unhealthy in one location constitute push conditions, while those that represent economic attraction in other places outside the original settlement of individuals now begin to serve as pull factors. These contradictory factors provide the necessary and sufficient reasons for people to migrate from their hometowns in search of a new means of livelihood in most nearby cities. Hence, the actual practice of migrating from a mostly rural area that has lost its economic viability by the definition of indigenous people is necessitated by the need for survival which finds expression in new settlements that afford migrants the opportunity for an appreciable livelihood.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested as ways to solve the challenge of environmental degradation and help migrants cope better:

1. **Social security:** Based on the fact that the oil and gas industry is responsible for the destruction of the livelihood of the people, there is a need to create a working system for people who reside in oil pollution impacted communities in the Niger Delta. This can be done by creating a fund pool or welfare bank where oil companies have to contribute some mandatory amount monthly as a way of providing financial support to community members who suffer from the adverse impacts of the oil companies' activities
2. **Genuine enforcement of environmental laws:** While it is clear that Nigeria is not short of environmental laws, enforcement has always been a problem. In this regard, efforts should be made by the State, at all levels to reduce the impact of environmental degradation through the enforcement of existing laws. This will be largely effective if there is some kind of community participation in the process. In this regard, community youths that are qualified should be recruited to be part of the environmental law enforcement network.

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