

Oil spills in Nigeria: are there social and economic impacts?

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Abstract: Globally, oil and gas exploration results in various problems, which include spills. Spills negatively impact on the environment and human health as well as social and economic activities. This poster focuses on the socio-economic impacts of spills in Nigeria because these impacts are increasingly multi-dimensional and are believed to be one of the main causes of insurgencies in the Niger Delta.

Purpose and Goals: This work highlights the socio-economic impact of spills in Nigeria, shows the ineffectiveness of current laws and proffers solutions to these problems. The goal is to get the stakeholders in the industry in Nigeria to prevent spills, prepare for spills, respond to spills and take actions to restore the environment in a more timely and efficient manner thereby reducing the socio-economic impacts.

Economic Impacts

Summary of the Impacts

Social Impacts

Damage to Farmlands

Oil spills have caused damage to farmlands which affects the Niger Delta economy.



Damage To Fishery And Wildlife

Fisheries had been very badly damaged as exemplified in this picture. This has impacted on their economy as well.



Loss of Income and Source of Livelihoods

Many Niger Deltans are commercial fishermen and farmers. With spills, farming, fishing and related businesses (such as boat charters for tourist) affected, many local economies have been destroyed which had increased poverty rates.



Food Shortage and hunger

Spills cause food shortage forcing Niger Deltans to buy (vice catch or harvest) their fish and food. Given their low purchasing power (when compared to oil workers), many do not eat well or eat at all because of the cost.



Destruction of Traditional Means of Livelihood/unemployment

With destruction of the farming and Fishing sectors which is the largest employer of labour in the area, unemployment abounds.



Prostitution and Rape

Hardship caused by spills forced many women into prostitution. According to Essential Actions and Global exchange (2000), many affected Niger Deltans engaged in prostitution to pay for their education and support their families. Their research further explained that these prostitutes are being raped.

Impact on Traditional Institutions of Authority and Cultural Values

Traditionally, elders and chiefs are custodians of the Niger Delta communities, with the authority to protect the community in times of trouble. Spills bring the elders closer to oil companies, resulting in the protection of individual interest in some cases especially where they clamor for clean-up contracts. For this reason, the elders were seen as being individualistic, thereby respect for that traditional institution is affected.

Conflicts

Spill consequences cause conflicts between communities, individuals and oil companies. Conflicts are mostly caused by occupational disorientation, increased poverty and Differential spill payment compensation.



Photo Above: A Nigerian militant levels his machine gun from the front of a war boat on the Escravos River in Delta state, Nigeria.

Destruction of Cultural Areas and Spirituality

Spills destroy medicinal plants and herbs found in sacred areas, shrines and forests that are symbols of spirituality.



Community Destruction, Forced Displacements, Migration and Environmental Refugees

Socio-culturally, Niger Deltans live in closely knit communities. The effect of spills caused Niger Deltans to migrate to cities to live in shanties and slums with their attendant risks. The Government frequently demolish these shanties, thereby rendering the migrants homeless.



Oil facility vandalism, kidnapping, militancy and terrorism

Having lost their primary source of livelihood, youth often become frustrated. This situation can lead to increased militancy, kidnapping and associated behaviours.



Relevant legal frameworks:

The Oil Pipeline Act of 1965
 Oil in Navigable Waters Act of 1968
 The Petroleum Act of 1969
 EGASPIN 1992 requires immediate containment of spills, with clean-up starting within 24 hours of a spill no matter the cause.
 The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Act of 2006 mandates NOSDRA (the institution created by the Act to monitor spills) to ensure safe, timely, effective and appropriate response to major spills among other functions.

Conclusion: Socio-economic impacts of spills in Nigeria are glaring. There are legal frameworks, but my research exposes the ineffectiveness of the laws. Some of the reasons for the ineffectiveness are ill-equipped regulatory institutions, corruption, conflicting roles, enforcement problems, weak penalties, fusion of roles and the problem of a mono-economy among others. Given these impacts and a generally ineffective legal response framework, I argue that spills greatly contributed to the Niger Delta insurgencies.

Recommended actions: Oil companies in Nigeria need to improve efforts to prevent oil spills, strengthen emergency response and better remediate the environment in line with international best practices. Nigerian Government should review spill response procedure, ensure independent monitoring, amend laws, improve enforcement initiatives and better clarify institutional roles and responsibilities. The Nigerian Government should also review spill compensation, create insurance fund for spills and initiate a comprehensive audit of the spilled environment. Finally, a committee for monitoring the socio-economic impact of spills should be created, avenue for public complaints provided and recommendations from the committee should be implemented.

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