



Oil, Conflicts, and Political Economy of Migration in Africa: The Nigeria's Niger Delta Experience

Victor Ojatorotu¹ 

¹ Department of Political Studies & International Relations, North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa and an Honorary Professor at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) South Africa.

ABSTRACT

In most African countries, especially Nigeria, migration is driven by economic hardship, unemployment, poverty, and the search for greener pastures overseas. In Niger Delta, in addition to the factors above, migration is driven by recurrent attacks and conflicts between militants and the Nigerian state over oil. Indeed, negative environmental externalities and violence resulting from long years of oil exploration in this region have made many, especially youths leave the region for safety and livelihood. This article thus examined the implications of oil pollution and other environmental stressors for migrants leaving the region. The paper hypothesized and sought to understand how oil politics and environmental deplorable conditions in this region exacerbate the engagement of illiterate young girls and women to migrate or be trafficked to urban centers as child laborers and sex workers within and outside Nigeria. The paper appraised how oil conflicts and environmental degradation could intensify migration risks among this group of people leaving the region. Utilizing empirical qualitative research design, the paper tested if the migration of youth in this region is partly related to manipulation and the negligence by the Nigerian state to commensurate spending from oil on the development of the region. The paper concluded that the recurrent oil conflicts and environmental conditions in the Niger Delta bring into focus the political economy of migration, globalization, and indigenous, and minority rights and struggles for sustainable means of livelihood.

Correspondence

Victor Ojatorotu

Email:

Victor.Ojatorotu@nwu.ac.za

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INTRODUCTION

In the Niger Delta region, oil conflicts and environmental degradation are some of the leading problems that have pushed people, especially the youth into migration. Although factors such as the search for greener pastures, jobs, and freedom from poverty have become very popular in pushing people into migration, oil conflicts and environmental degradation are also pushing factors that have rarely been considered and researched. One of the unique features of this region is the recurrent cases of violence between the Nigerian state and the militant groups.¹ Some of the causes of the violence are the struggle for survival and development of the region, which has been lagging partly due to the failure of the Nigerian government to adequately spend oil revenue for the betterment of the region.² Extant studies have recognized and classified the Niger Delta region as a theatre of resource curse, that is, a situation where the endowment of oil has yielded very little or no gain, but more troubles and pains in host communities and the entire country. These troubles and pains are usually in the form of incessant violence, environmental pollution, and other related problems. The connection

¹ Y. Omotayo, "Army Storm Bayelsa to Stop Declaration of Niger Delta Republic," *Leadership Newspaper, Abuja*, August 1, 2016, <https://www.legit.ng/910654-declaration-niger-delta-republic-military-begins-operation-bayelsa.html>.

² R. Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta.," in *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*, ed. C. Obi and Ristadeds S.A. (London/New York : 2 Ed Books, 2011).

between these troubles or pains and migration has received very little attention, as evidence shows that oil violence, poverty, and environmental pollution also drive or push young adults from this region into migration.³ It is a fact that most young adults leaving this region, especially those migrating from Edo, Cross River, Rivers, and other states of the Niger Delta region, have blamed incessant violence over oil, insecurity, filthy environment, poverty, underdevelopment, unemployment, among others as the leading motivations for their movement out of their states.⁴

Environmental challenges in Niger Delta are severely enormous, ranging from the damage of soil fertility due to oil exploration to the damage of aquatic and wildlife due to gas flaring.⁵ These challenges render people from this region very poor, as they are constantly faced with environmental abuse caused by their quest for peace and sustainable development. In addition, various government interventions purposely designed to address these environmental challenges have failed due to inefficiency and corruption. Similarly, the Nigerian state and its elites are also frustrating the efforts of representatives of this region over resource control that would aid the equitable distribution of oil resources in the region.⁶ This opposition against resource control is partly the leading cause of violence, which, in the long run, has partly contributed to the displacement of many people, including youth, who now seek refuge in other states or outside Nigeria.⁷ Ideally, with proper implementation of petroleum policies purposely designed to address environmental injustice, pollution, and other challenges, the region is expected to be peaceful in order to generate the desired level of development.⁸ However, the reality on the ground in this region, shows that unless the fundamental problems are addressed, the region will remain a theatre of violence and instability, which will continue to push people to seek refuge in safer states or countries outside Nigeria.

It is no more new news that young people from this region are used as farm laborers to cultivate lands, caregivers, and shop-attendants, among others in other regions, especially Southwestern, Nigeria. While the cause of their movement to other regions has been widely attributed to political-economic factors such as political instability, bad governance, political violence, and economic hardships such as poverty, and unemployment, among others, Ikuteyijo, oil curse-related factors (such as oil conflicts, gas flaring, damage to aquatic life, poisoning of water due to chemical release during oil exploration, environmental degradation) of migration, have hardly received research attention.⁹ It is a fact that not all scholars or researchers have linked the migration of young people from this region to the oil curse situation in the region. However, majority of the migration in this region was related to large-scale poverty, environmental degradation, (oil spillage, gas flaring, pollution erosion, dirtiness, among others), and, oil violence.¹⁰ These factors have continually pushed young adults from this region, especially, in Cross River and Edo states into irregular or illegal migration and human trafficking.¹¹ Evidence shows that Cross River State is highly vulnerable to oil curse syndrome, which, in the long run, appears to be driving young adults from the state into trafficking due to its strategic location in Cameroun. Communities such as Mfum in northern and central parts of the state, specifically in Etung Local Government Area have been classified as migratory routes for human trafficking to Cameroun and other African countries. In the same vein, Edo State has been classified as the most prevalent state in international human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution. Official reports indicated that about 98% of victims of external trafficking and 47% of convicted traffickers are from Edo State. Given the foregoing reports, it can be inferred that, unlike other regions, the Niger Delta region, is faced with problems of transactional human trafficking,

³ L. Ikuteyijo, "Illegal Migration and Policy Challenges in Nigeria," *Africa Portal, Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI)*, January 1, 2012.

⁴ Sheriff Ghali Ibrahim, Sadeeque Abba, and Farouq Bibi, "Resource Based Conflicts and Political Instability in Africa: Major Trends, Challenges and Prospects," *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* 1, no. 9 (2014): 71–78.

⁵ A. Ajodo-Adebanjoko, "Towards Ending Conflict and Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region,"

<https://Reliefweb.Int/Report/Nigeria/towards-Ending-Conflict-and-Insecurity-Niger-Delta-Region>. (African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 2017).

⁶ Ajodo-Adebanjoko, "Towards Ending Conflict and Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region"; Samuel Chukwudi Agunyai and Victor Ojakorotu, "Governance Failure and the Formation of Anti-State Organisations: The Impact of the Amnesty Policy on the Development of Nigeria's Niger-Delta, Nigeria," *African Journal of Governance & Development* 10, no. 2 (2021): 356.

⁷ Ikuteyijo, "Illegal Migration and Policy Challenges in Nigeria"; Lanre Olusegun Ikuteyijo, "Irregular Migration as Survival Strategy: Narratives from Youth in Urban Nigeria," in *West African Youth Challenges and Opportunity Pathways* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 53–77, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21092-2_3.

⁸ Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta."; O.C. Osezua, *Gender and Religious Dimensions of Human Trafficking in Sub-Saharan Africa in Religious Diversity Today* (United States: Praeger Publishers, 2016).

⁹ Ikuteyijo, "Irregular Migration as Survival Strategy: Narratives from Youth in Urban Nigeria."

¹⁰ Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta."; A.I. Adeniran, "Gender Variability in Migrants' Smuggling Processes along the Nigerian-Libya Corridor," in *Text of Paper Presented at Migration and Crime Conference, Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute Florence, Italy*, 2018; Ikuteyijo, "Illegal Migration and Policy Challenges in Nigeria."

¹¹ Osezua, *Gender and Religious Dimensions of Human Trafficking in Sub-Saharan Africa in Religious Diversity Today*.

which is partly caused by the syndrome of the oil curse.¹² This brings to the fore the importance of conducting research in this direction, because, the results of this research will guide the designing of appropriate policies to address inherent problems associated with the oil curse syndrome and the control of irregular and illegal migration by young adults in this region.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study sought to establish the nexus between conflicts and migration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study relied on secondary sources from extant journal publications, newspapers and magazines, government publications, etc. Content analysis was adopted for the study as it allowed the researcher to interpret the various information gathered from the various sources.

DISCUSSION

Problematizing Linkages between Oil Curse and Migration in Nigeria

Man by nature is adventure and survives through movement from one place to the other, especially when Man's original residence becomes highly unbearable and uncondusive for living. Several factors are responsible for man's migration from one place to the other. It has been widely documented that migration has both pushing and pulling factors.¹³ Pushing factors are deplorable conditions that tend to force man out of the original place of abode. Examples of such factors include poverty, malnutrition, economic hardships, unemployment, hunger, violence, natural disasters, and pandemics, among others.¹⁴ Pulling factors constitute those that tend to lure or induce people to leave their original abode. In this research, focus is paid to the pushing factors. Indeed, the Niger Delta region is naturally blessed with mineral resources including crude oil and Nigeria is among the world's largest producers of crude oil as almost 90% of its total export revenue comes from the sale of oil and distillation products.¹⁵ Nigeria is the 8th largest oil exporter in terms of value and has one of the main oil reserves in the world. About 95% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings are provided by oil and 80% of the country's budget is financed by oil revenues.¹⁶ Similarly, 8% of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Corporation's (OPEC) total daily production and 3% of the world's volume are financed by Nigeria's oil revenues.¹⁷ Expectedly, with all these positive attributes from oil revenue, Nigeria and the Niger Delta, in particular, with huge deposits of oil, is hoped to be highly developed in terms of infrastructure, equitable distribution of wealth, education, availability of jobs, poverty reduction, regular power supply, and gender equality, reduction in hunger and malnutrition, and improved healthcare system.¹⁸ The current reality in the region shows that the huge deposit of crude oil is more of a curse than a blessing due to incessant violence over the distribution of wealth and proceeds from the crude oil, environmental degradation, militants' activities, and diseases resulting from gas flaring, pollution, and other oil-related activities.¹⁹

Several attempts have been made by the Nigerian government to address oil curse problems in this region. Some of these measures include the establishment of the Amnesty Policy, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas, Niger Delta Environmental Survey, and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), task force on pipeline Vandalisation, Ministry of Niger-Delta, among others. At the state level, measures such as the passing of a law prohibiting militant activities, and the creation of a special local vigilante group to man oil pipelines have all been put into place. However, despite these measures, the region remains largely volatile, unstable, and underdeveloped. In other words, despite the huge amount of oil revenues accruing from this region, it has largely remained underdeveloped compared to other non-oil producing regions. Oil conflicts and environmental degradation continue unabated as many lives and properties have been destroyed following the violence between the Nigerian security agencies and militant groups in the region. The persistence of oil violence and environmental pollution in this region appears to be pushing many young adults into irregular and illegal migration. This might have made Ako conclude that majority of sex workers, child and farm laborers, in other parts of, or outside Nigeria, especially in Italy are from some states (Cross River, Edo Akwa-Ibom, Rivers) in

¹² Z. Adela, "Resource Curse: Case Study of Nigeria," in *Being a Paper Presented at the 8th Economics & Finance Conference, University of Economics in Prague, London, 2017.*

¹³ Ikuteyijo, "Illegal Migration and Policy Challenges in Nigeria."

¹⁴ IOM, 2010.

¹⁵ Adela, "Resource Curse: Case Study of Nigeria."

¹⁶ Adela, "Resource Curse: Case Study of Nigeria."

¹⁷ Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta."; Ajodo-Adebanjoko, "Towards Ending Conflict and Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region."

¹⁸ Adela, "Resource Curse: Case Study of Nigeria"; Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta."

¹⁹ P.A.N. Mwanika, "Natural Resources Conflict Management Processes and Strategies in Africa," <www.Makepeacehappen.Net> (Pretoria, ISS.: Institute for Security Studies (ISS) , 2010).

Niger Delta.²⁰ Some of the most cited reasons why young girls leave or migrate outside Edo state in Nigeria are poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and the growing trend of inequality and unequal distribution of oil wealth.

The incessant cases of oil conflicts, environmental degradation, and insecurity have severe implications for irregular or illegal migration. Similarly, the availability of oil resources in this region has led to competition over the control of valuable oil supplies and pipeline routes, which in the long run, has remained the bane of grave source of conflict in the 21st century, Nigeria.²¹ The foregoing properly explains Niger Delta's situation, where the exploration of oil has led to several damaging conditions such as drought, famine, destruction of farmlands, pollution, unclean environment, ailment arising from gas flaring, damage of aquatic life, without adequate reward, have continually provoked conflict, which tends to displace people. Displacement is one of the triggers of migration, as people are displaced from their original homes, they tend to seek refuge in a safer environment, state, or country. In addition, a conflictual environment or region, like that of the Niger Delta, is more likely to be prone to poverty, unemployment, poor healthcare facilities, among others. These deplorable conditions are potential triggers of migration of young people from the region.²² And since some of the features of the oil curse are poverty, unemployment, violence, underdevelopment, health challenges, inequalities, and hunger amid huge oil resources, just as the case may be in the Niger Delta, it is reasonable to infer that the oil curse drives or stimulates migration. This might have accounted for the reason why Ako strongly held the view that deplorable conditions (poverty, violence, environmental degradation) of people in rural communities in most of the Niger Delta states, especially Cross River, push them to work as farm laborers, sex-hawkers, and house caregivers in other parts of Nigeria or outside the country.²³

One other implication of irregular or illegal migration of youth from this region is the subjugation of these youths into hard labor without any sustainable compensation. They suffer from abuse, rape, and harassment, which in the long run, inflict on them emotional trauma.²⁴ The home state also suffers from the loss of an economically active population that could have contributed to its productivity and economic growth. It is a fact that the future of any country largely depends on the availability of the young population. The more these young adults leave their state in search of jobs and safety in other states or countries, the greater the home state or country loses the contributions of these groups to their economic sustainability.²⁵ Given the negative effects of irregular migration caused by oil conflicts and environmental degradation, the choice of this research becomes very important, because if something is not done speedily to address the oil curse problems (oil conflicts, insecurity, poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, among others) in this region, it could amount to a situation where none of the states in this region, would benefit from the contributions of their economically active population, which is made up of youth. In any society, the youth contribute to its growth and development; because they are actively involved in the labour force for productivity. The 2006 census shows that the youthful population constituted over 70% and this young population would be of great value if they were harnessed and utilized in the right direction. The fear of losing contributions from young adults, who are continually migrating from this region, due to the oil curse, informed the choice of this research.²⁶

Similar extant research has been conducted to examine the oil curse in the Niger Delta region. However, these studies have extensively examined the causes of the oil curse and its implications in this region and found that this region is largely underdeveloped and not adequately reaping from the gains of oil, despite its huge deposits of oil resources. Evidence is sparse on how the oil curse pushes young Nigerian youths into migration and the consequences of irregular or illegal migration. It is hoped that this research will provide adequate information on how states in the Niger Delta can address oil curse problems and mitigate the massive outflow of their young population.

Conceptualizing Oil Curse, Migration, Irregular Migration in Nigeria

Oil or resource curse is simply the process whereby the huge deposits or endowment of oil resources in most developing countries, appears to be yielding abysmal developmental outcomes, in the form of unequal distribution of wealth, large-scale corruption, governance crisis or failure, dwindling economic growth, poor

²⁰ Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta."

²¹ Sambit Bhattacharyya and Namera Mamo, "Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: What Do the Data Show?," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 69, no. 3 (April 1, 2021): 903–50, <https://doi.org/10.1086/704513>.

²² Daniel Kasomo, "An Assessment of Ethnic Conflict and Its Challenges Today," *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 6, no. 1 (2012): 1–7.

²³ Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta."

²⁴ Ikuteyijo, "Illegal Migration and Policy Challenges in Nigeria."

²⁵ O. Mbanefo, "Migration and the Dislocation of Nigeria's Social Fabric: The Governance Question," in *Migration and Governance in Africa: Lessons for Policymakers*, ed. U. Okeke-Uzodike, H. Onapajo, and C Ihuoma (African Heritage Institute, 2021), 19–33.

²⁶ Kasomo, "An Assessment of Ethnic Conflict and Its Challenges Today."

economic performance, and high level of political and community violence.²⁷ It is a situation where host communities or oil-producing countries have nothing to show or are not reaping adequately from the huge deposits of oil in their communities or countries.²⁸

Importantly, the oil curse depicts a situation, where the endowment of oil in a region is causing the region lots of problems in terms of incessant conflicts, damage to farmlands without any meaningful compensation, damage to aquatic life, poisoning of the waterways or seas, diseases contracted due to gas flaring and oil exploration, destruction of lives and properties due to clashes between militant groups and state security agents, among others.²⁹ Oil or resource curse which is otherwise known as the ‘paradox of plenty’ is the inability of oil-rich or producing regions or countries to reach their full economic potential in terms of fully benefiting from their oil resources wealth and the failure of the government in oil-rich states, regions, or countries to adequately provide or meet public welfare needs.³⁰ Expectedly, oil-rich states or countries, all things being equal should be highly developed, stable, progressive, and possess the ability to meet public welfare needs.³¹ However, the findings of extant studies showed that oil-rich states or countries tend to suffer from a high scale of violence, instability, corruption, authoritarianism, and poor economic growth and development, unlike non-oil-rich states or countries. It encompasses political, social, environmental, and economic challenges that are unique to oil-rich states or countries. Oil or resource curse in any country is caused by so many factors, some of these factors and their implications are explained in the preceding paragraphs.

First, one of the leading causes of the oil curse is the overreliance on the taxation of extractive industries at the expense of personal income tax.³² It is a fact that in most oil-producing states and countries, governments in these countries, depend largely on the taxation of extractive industries or oil multinational corporations, citizens in these countries are less taxed and as such, they may not effectively follow up on government expenditure or demand accountability from the government. This has implications for authoritarianism, where the government rules with excessive authority over the citizens. Similarly, as oil-producing countries earn large revenues from taxing natural resources firms, they tend to be less dependent on levying taxes on citizens, and thus citizens feel less concerned with the annual budget. Governments also seem not committed to citizen requests or demands. Further, when resource revenues are shrouded in secrecy, it makes it very difficult for citizens to have a clear view or sense of how the revenue is spent. Thus, it can be reasonably inferred that while the cause of the oil curse is the overconcentration of government on the taxation of extractive industries, it has implications for dictatorship or authoritarianism.³³

Secondly, it is caused by internal conflicts, as different groups fight for control of the resources or use natural resources to finance their fighting.”³⁴ The Niger Delta region, Iraq, Libya, and Angola are typical examples of oil-producing countries with a huge magnitude of internal conflicts, resulting in an oil curse.³⁵ In Niger Delta, various militant groups are established to make known their grievances over the damage to their farmlands, environment, and properties, among others, due to oil exploration.³⁶ This tends to generate internal conflicts or clashes between Nigerian security agents and these militant groups. This has implications for displacement and irregular migration of people from this region.

²⁷ Y. Brenner, R. Forin, and B. Frouws, “The ‘Shift’ to the Western Mediterranean Migration Route: Myth or Reality? ,” [Http://Www.Mixedmigration.Org/Articles/Shift-to-the-Western-Mediterranean-Migration-Route/#](http://www.Mixedmigration.Org/Articles/Shift-to-the-Western-Mediterranean-Migration-Route/#). (Mixed Migration Center (MMC), August 22, 2018).

²⁸ Paul Stevens, Glada Lahn, and Jaakko Kooroshy, *The Resource Curse Revisited* (Chatham House for the Royal Institute of International Affairs London, 2015).

²⁹ Thorvaldur Gylfason, “Natural Resources, Education, and Economic Development,” *European Economic Review* 45, no. 4–6 (2001): 847–59; X Sala-i-Martin and A Subramanian, “Addressing the Natural Resource Curse: The Economics of Exhaustible Resources Economic Performance,” *Journal of Economic History* 67, no. 1 (2003): 11–32; Benjamin Smith, “Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960–1999,” *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (2004): 232–46.

³⁰ NRG Natural Resource Governance Institute, “The Resource Curse. The Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth” (NRGI Reader , 2015).

³¹ R. Arezki et al., “Testing the Prebisch-Singer Hypothesis since 1650: Evidence from Panel Techniques That Allow for Multiple Break,” IMF Working Paper , August 2013.

³² Robert T Deacon and Ashwin Rode, “14. Rent Seeking and the Resource Curse,” *Companion to the Political Economy of Rent Seeking* 227 (2015).

³³ Arezki et al., “Testing the Prebisch-Singer Hypothesis since 1650: Evidence from Panel Techniques That Allow for Multiple Break.”

³⁴ Frederick van der Ploeg, “Natural Resources: Curse or Blessing?,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 49, no. 2 (2011): 366–420.

³⁵ Natural Resource Governance Institute, “The Resource Curse. The Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth.”

³⁶ Ako, “The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta.”; Omotayo, “Army Storm Bayelsa to Stop Declaration of Niger Delta Republic .”

Thirdly, the oil curse is caused by inefficient spending and borrowing.³⁷ Oil revenues change from year to year depending on global oil prices and production capacity. If the amount of oil revenues spent in oil-producing communities is low or inefficient to generate the needed developmental outcomes, it could be termed an oil curse, because the oil-producing states are receiving very little from oil proceeds compared to other non-oil producing states. Governments in most oil-producing states or countries tend to spend more on legacy projects (airports, seaports, and monuments) during the oil boom periods. Similarly, they tend to spend more on overhead costs and salaries as well as inefficient fuel subsidies and underspend on health, education, and other social services, which can be of immense benefits to oil-producing communities. In addition, the oil curse is also caused by over-borrowing, especially during the oil boom, when the country has creditworthiness. This has implications for debt crises and the underdevelopment of the oil-producing communities.³⁸

Fourth, issues with patriarchy and gender inequality make the oil curse worse. Wealth from natural resources appears to affect women disproportionately. According to a recent study, women are underrepresented in the workforce and in political positions in oil-rich nations. One explanation for this is that the oil curse makes it less probable for companies that are typically easier for women to pursue, such as manufacturing with an export focus, to be successful in nations with abundant resources. Additionally, research has indicated that women are more likely to develop HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses in resource-rich regions. Gender-based violence rates have risen along with the significant migration of men into areas near mines.³⁹

The oil curse is also a result of the limited government advantages that are captured. In some instances, only a small portion of the resource's output value is retained by the nation or local host communities.⁴⁰ One reason is that many fiscal regimes, which are laws governing how profits are divided between businesses and governments, don't adequately compensate states and oil-producing communities for the depletion of their resources, associated environmental harm, or loss of livelihood. These bad deals can occur when nations cut tax and royalty rates in an effort to promote resource extraction without fully appreciating the worth of their natural resources. The average effective tax rate (AETR) for many oil projects in nations including Argentina, Canada, the United States, and South Africa is less than 50%, while for many mining operations in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Peru, and the Philippines, the AETR is less than 40%. In contrast, the AETR on numerous oil projects in Timor-Leste, Libya, Angola, and Norway is greater than 70%. Furthermore, locals receive minimal non-tax advantages, such as jobs, in capital-intensive extractive businesses (as opposed to labor-intensive ones). Although there may not be many chances, there are frequently very high expectations for local content, which includes employment, the growth of local businesses, and better labor skills. The industry has a very low employment rate compared to the magnitude of investments and occupations, and the machinery needed to implement them, which is typically imported from overseas, tends to be particularly specialized.

Finally, socio-environmental issues are what have led to the oil curse. When attempting to balance the requirements of the people and environments that surround the mining area, the point-source aspect of extractive industries frequently poses complications. Conflict between the community and the mining firms may arise when resources like land, water, and minerals are shared and compensated. Furthermore, even when there aren't any additional jobs available, extraction projects frequently draw sizable crowds. Economic, social, and cultural relations may be strained as a result. Environmental issues include a wide range of issues, including dust from mining, landscape scarring, noise from process operation, contamination of water sources (from the disposal of waste rock and tailings), massive water use in the extractive process, gas flaring (which causes health problems and wasteful CO₂ emissions), and seismic disturbances. In addition, many of the political and economic issues mentioned above violate human rights or have the potential to do so. These problems should be addressed and it could be made clear who is responsible for managing these effects in the contract between the government and the extraction business.⁴¹

Since migration is a frequently debated worldwide issue, it is imperative to comprehensively define migration from the perspectives of individuals, states, and society in general. Migration is a complex phenomenon that captures a vibrant, continuously changing reality.⁴² Migration signifies the passage of a person across the border of an administrative unit for a specific amount of time. Those who move are included in this group, along with those who migrate due to economic or other reasons in different circumstances, such as family

³⁷ Natural Resource Governance Institute, "The Resource Curse. The Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth."

³⁸ Natural Resource Governance Institute, "The Resource Curse. The Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth."

³⁹ A. Oyefusi, "Oil-Dependence and Civil Conflict in Nigeria" (University of Benin, Nigeria, 2007).

⁴⁰ J. Farley, "Natural Capital," in *The Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability: Ecosystem Management and Sustainability*, ed. P. et al. Bruce (Berkshire Publishing Group, 2012), 264.

⁴¹ R. Blench, *National Resources Conflict in North-Central Nigeria: A Handbook and Case Studies* (Cambridge : Mallam Dendo Ltd, 2004).

⁴² Adebuseyuyi Isaac Adeniran, "The Migration and Integration of Ejjigbo-Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 26, no. 2 (2017): 14.

reunions, or for other purposes. Sulima described migration as a phenomenon involving the concurrent change of three key parameters:

- i) a change of domicile involving the crossing of a political or national border;
- ii) a change of the location where they carry out their professional activity (even if they practice the same profession);
- iii) a modification of social ties (the entry into a new community).⁴³

Both internal and international migration are possible. Internal migration is the movement from one region (province, county, municipality) to another region that is located on the same country's territory. People move across borders, or between states and nations, in an international migration.⁴⁴ Two types of relocation can be excluded from this comprehensive definition: first, the territorial movement that does not affect social ties and, therefore, is irrelevant for both the individual and society (such as tourism); second, relocation is excluded when the individuals or groups involved are merely passive objects and not active agents of the movement (for example, the organized transfer of refugees from their home states to a safe haven). The two types of migration that are typically distinguished are forced and voluntary migration. Voluntary migration is driven by an individual's initiative and free will and is impacted by a variety of economic, political, and social variables in both the country of origin and the country of destination (determinant factors or "push factors") (attraction factors or "pull factors").⁴⁵

The causes that draw people to a certain location are known as "pull-push factors." The "pull" factors are the favorable features of another nation that lure individuals to emigrate in quest of a better life, whereas the "push" elements are the drawbacks of the place of origin that are frequently deciding factors in people's decisions to leave. Although the push-pull components appear to be diametrically opposing, they are both equally important and represent one whole. Despite being specific to forced migration, any other negative factor can be a "push factor," "determinant," or "trigger factor. Among the examples are poor living conditions, lack of jobs, extreme pollution, famine, drought, or natural calamities. Such circumstances serve as compelling justifications for voluntary migration, with the populace choosing to leave in order to avoid financially adverse circumstances or even mental and physical anguish.⁴⁶

From the foregoing analysis, it can be deduced that migration could be triggered by political and economic factors. The political factors include governance failure to provide security, service delivery, jobs, a conducive atmosphere for peaceful co-existence, and political electoral violence, among others. Economic factors include the search for greener pastures, higher labor income, economic hardships, and poverty. Political and economic factors constitute reasons why young adults in Africa resort to irregular or illegal migration.

Irregular or illegal migration has remained a recurrent problem affecting many African countries, including Nigeria. Some of the reasons why young Africans engage in irregular or illegal migration are those enlisted in political and economic factors of migration. According to Ikuteyijo, drivers of irregular migration include economic adversity, unemployment, poverty, and inequality.⁴⁷ There is no globally accepted definition of irregular migration Perkowska.⁴⁸ It is still frequently used synonymously with "illegal migration".⁴⁹ As illegal migration includes cases of smuggling and trafficking of persons, irregular migration is the movement of individuals outside the regulatory rules and laws of the home, transit, and host nations' legal frameworks.⁵⁰ Irregular migration or migrants constitutes cases of migrants who were refused entry at foreign borders, those who illegally enter a country, those deported or ordered to leave the country, and those who violate administrative protocols of entry into the country.⁵¹

A critical look at this analysis indicates that there is a difference between illegal and irregular migration. While illegal migration is majorly focused on the country of destination, irregular migration is focused on both the home and the country of destination. Illegal migration is the entrance of migrants into a country of

⁴³ S. Sulima, "Migration and Mobility within the Framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy," in *Social Sciences and Management*, ed. Târgu Mureş (Romania: Arhipelago, 2015), 282–91, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321267673_Migration_and_Mobility_within_the_Framework_of_the_European_Neighbourhood_Policy_in_East.

⁴⁴ Adeniran, "Gender Variability in Migrants' Smuggling Processes along the Nigerian-Libya Corridor."

⁴⁵ International Organization for Migration, 2010.

⁴⁶ Agunyai and Ojakorotu, "Governance Failure and the Formation of Anti-State Organisations: The Impact of the Amnesty Policy on the Development of Nigeria's Niger-Delta, Nigeria."

⁴⁷ Ikuteyijo, "Irregular Migration as Survival Strategy: Narratives from Youth in Urban Nigeria."

⁴⁸ Magdalena Perkowska, "Illegal, Legal, Irregular or Regular—Who Is the Incoming Foreigner?," *Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric* 45, no. 1 (2016): 187–97.

⁴⁹ Evie Browne, "Drivers of Irregular Migration in North Africa" (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1271, 2015).

⁵⁰ Browne, "Drivers of Irregular Migration in North Africa."

⁵¹ Browne, "Drivers of Irregular Migration in North Africa."

destination without any due process or status. It is a form of migration that is contrary to and against both national and international lawful standards.⁵² Illegal migration is more of a process and status. Irregular migration is the movement from (home country) a country into a (country of destination) country without any valid administrative documents authorized by the immigration offices in both countries.⁵³ Empirical evidence shows that young adults from Nigeria are mostly engaged in both illegal and irregular migration. The majority of the young Africans migrating to developed nations in an increasing number are Nigerians. Over 20,000 people from Nigeria were said to have traveled across the Mediterranean Sea in 2016. Countries such as Italy, Libya, and South Africa, deported hundreds of migrants from Nigeria between 2017 and late 2019. These young individuals migrate across countries in very dangerous ways, and every day there are more casualties. According to Ikuteyijo, most young Nigerians are engaged in irregular migration for purposes such as the economic situation, family commitments and the influence of social media.⁵⁴ Majority of these youth see travelling overseas as an achievement or success.

Theoretical mapping of the connection between the oil curse, oil conflicts, and irregular migration in Nigeria

Eco-violence or environmental conflict theory was propounded by Homer-Dixon to explain the connection between oil resources, the oil curse, and the oil conflict.⁵⁵ Since one of the drivers of irregular migration includes conflict or violence, this theory holds the view that the decrease in the quantity and quality of natural or renewable resources could singlehandedly or combine to increase the scarcity in host oil-producing communities of vegetation, farmlands, forest, rivers, and water. The shortage of natural resources can limit productivity, which in turn, affects not only local communities but the larger country as a whole. As a result, the affected people may migrate to seek more economic opportunities in another region or country. They could also be displaced from their home by conflicts over scarce resources.⁵⁶ The theory's core argument is based on the fact that violent conflict is caused by the dwindling amount of renewable natural resources, which causes competition for limited resources.⁵⁷

In the same vein, Annan noted that "environmental challenges" in the form of harmful air or water pollution, desertification, resource depletion, and demographic pressure exacerbate tensions and instability which are drivers of irregular migration.⁵⁸ Michael also noted that competition over the control of oil resources and pipeline routes has emerged as a particularly acute source of conflict in the 21st-century, Africa. This is demonstrated by the fierce struggle for natural resources in Africa, which has resulted in violent conflict in some African countries, including Nigeria.⁵⁹ The aforementioned succinctly explained the Niger Delta situation in Nigeria, where oil exploration has continually provoked conflicts and insecurity, which have displaced people from their local communities into seeking refuge in safer regions or communities. This might have made the late environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa lament that the inhabitants of the area faced extinction.⁶⁰ Oil exploration in Niger Delta has caused the host communities and local people to become increasingly frustrated, which has sparked violent opposition that has culminated in violence between militant locals and the Nigerian security agencies and oil companies that operate in the area.

Applying this theory to the subject, it can be deduced that oil exploration in Niger Delta is more of an oil curse due to the incessant competition over the control of the oil resources between the host communities and the operating firms in the region. While local people in this region suffer from uncompensated loss of farmlands, waterways, depleted soil fertility, gas flaring, and other oil-resources related problems, the Nigerian state and its few elites enjoy the huge earnings from oil revenues from taxation imposed on oil multinational corporations. These huge earnings have made successive Nigerian governments less concerned about the plight of the people in oil-producing host communities. This has over the years, remained the leading cause of violence and displacement, which, in turn, has constituted one of the drivers of irregular migration of people, especially

⁵² D. Davitti and A. Ursu, "Why Securitising the Sahel Will Not Stop Migration" (Nottingham: University of Nottingham - Human Rights Law Centre, 2018).

⁵³ Hein De Haas, *Irregular Migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union: An Overview of Recent Trends*, vol. 32 (International Organization for Migration Geneva, 2008).

⁵⁴ Ikuteyijo, "Irregular Migration as Survival Strategy: Narratives from Youth in Urban Nigeria."

⁵⁵ Thomas F Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, 30.

⁵⁷ C K Ajaero et al., "The Drought-Migration Nexus: Implications for Socio-Ecological Conflicts in Nigeria," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 S1 (2015): 470.

⁵⁸ K. Annan, "Secretary-General's Address to the 2006 UN Climate Change Conference," 2006, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sgsm10739.doc.htm>.

⁵⁹ Bhattacharyya and Mamo, "Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: What Do the Data Show?"

⁶⁰ Saro-Wiwa, cited in N. Na'Allah, *Ogoni's Agonies: Ken Saro Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998).

young adults from this region. For example, the resurgence of the Niger Delta Avengers, a militant group, during Buhari's administration, exacerbated tension, fear, and insecurity, which tended to push people from affected host communities to leave the region for safer communities, states, or countries. Evidence shows that some of the Libya returnees include mainly youth from the Niger Delta region. According to Agunyai et al, majority of these youths resorted to risky irregular migration, partly due to the massive depletion of their local farmlands, loss of soil fertility, damage to seas and rivers, where they ply their fishing trade, loss of their job caused by oil exploration, which has remained more as a curse than a blessing in the region.⁶¹

Redressing the Oil Curse and Irregular Migration in Nigeria

Having established the linkages between oil conflicts or curses and irregular migration, it is important to discuss how the oil curse or conflict can be controlled to reduce incessant irregular migration by the Nigerian youth. In Niger Delta, all indicators of development and sustainable peace and security are lacking, despite the endowment of its oil resources. It is also a fact to note that this region, despite being one of the highest contributors to Nigeria's national wealth and revenue, is still largely reaping very little from oil wealth. The region is faced with problems of poverty, unemployment, poor education and healthcare facilities, corruption, insecurity, and environmental degradation. In other words, just like the oil curse theory hypothesizes, oil exploration in Niger Delta has remained a tool of destruction and further impoverishment of the region. It is expected that oil-producing host communities in this region should have been rapidly developed in terms of service delivery, infrastructures, economic development, reduced poverty, malnutrition, low crime rate, security, and sustainable peace. It is generally believed or expected that a region, where the country's most income-generating resources are coming from should be highly developed and sustainable due to its huge contribution to the national wealth. However, the reverse is the case in the Niger Delta region, where oil resources have been a stumbling block to the progress of the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address this problem, the Nigerian government, policymakers, community leaders, government functionaries in charge of policies and programmes targeted at the region, and youth should consider the following measures:

First, the Nigerian government and its taxation officers should intensify efforts to levy every citizen tax, especially the 'pay-as-you-earn' tax. This will go a long way in reawakening Nigerian citizens to the need to hold the government accountable for their taxes. Evidence has shown that in most oil-rich countries, including Nigeria, emphasis is placed more on extractive industries for taxation than on citizens. This has made most citizens feel less concerned about government spending on developmental projects. It is hoped that as citizens are taxed by the government, they would effectively follow up on government expenditure since their taxes form a larger portion of the country's revenue. The greater the government-citizens relation, especially in forms of proper accountability and good governance, the lesser the urge for irregular migration

Secondly, the government should as a matter of urgency be more committed to the plight of people in oil-producing communities. This includes respect for their rights and safety as well as efficient provision of basic essential services that can stimulate sustainable development in this region. Provision of infrastructure, improved healthcare services, education, reduction in poverty and unemployment and adequate security will go a long way to reduce violence over oil resources in this region. This will also help to reduce irregular and illegal migration of young adults in the region.

Thirdly, there is a need to ensure the proper and adequate implementation of various governmental policies targeted to resolve varying oil-resources problems in the region. Evidence shows a gap in the implementation of previous and current governmental policies to address oil conflicts and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. This will go a long way in promoting trust and confidence in government. The capturing and inclusiveness of idle and unemployed youths from this region, as beneficiaries of the policies, will also reduce illegal migration.

Fourthly, the anti-corruption and security agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the police, ICPC, DSS, and other related agencies should intensify efforts to arrest and prosecute corrupt government functionaries caught with looting and mismanagement of oil revenue from the region. This will enhance the equitable distribution of oil wealth and promote the timely completion of developmental projects in the region.⁶²

⁶¹ Agunyai Samuel Chukwudi, Ojakorotu Victor, and Bamidele Samson Olukayode, "Migration and Remittances in Nigeria: Impact Analysis on Youths in Ogwashi-Uku Community in Delta State.," *African Renaissance (1744-2532)* 19, no. 2 (2022).

⁶² A. Ajodo-Adebanjoko and O. Takim, " An Assessment of Niger-Delta Crisis on Nigeria's External Relations - From 1992–2008," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3, no. 8 (2013): 179–92.

Lastly, the people of the Niger Delta region, especially the youth and women should be carried along in all the developmental process and critical decision-making concerning the development of the region. The people should have a robust voice in their own affairs. Instead of imposing or rolling down policies decided at the national level on them, without any of their contribution, they should be made to participate in the decision-making process of the development of their region. This might have led to Ako's conclusion that mitigation strategies to end oil conflict in the region should include active participation of all stakeholders and an element of democracy.⁶³

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's Niger Delta region is currently described as a resource curse zone mainly because of the fact that the endowment of oil resources and wealth or revenue accruing to Nigeria from this region, does not commensurate with the level of development expected in this region. Oil resources in the region, rather than bequeathing to the region sustainable peace, improved infrastructure, healthcare and educational systems, and a sustainable environment, have provoked more ravaging conflicts that have driven the people, especially the youth, into irregular and illegal migration. Indeed, youths from this region, especially from Cross River, Edo, River, Imo, and other states, have been victims of attacks, rape, imprisonment, human or sex trafficking, and child labor, because they resorted to irregular migration. Many of them are among those deported from Libya and their experience along irregular migratory routes is pathetic and traumatizing. Sincere solutions, change of attitude, and reforms on the part of the Nigerian government, its functionaries, and public openness towards equitable distribution of oil wealth, will jointly help to minimize oil conflicts and irregular migration, in order to harness the potential of youths for economic productivity that can drive job creation, reduce poverty, and contribute to safer and peaceful co-existence in communities across Nigeria's Niger Delta region.

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⁶³ Ako, "The Struggle for Resource Control and Violence in the Niger Delta."

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Victor Ojakorotu is a scholar of International relations and an astute professor at North West University, South Africa. He holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. A First Class Honours graduate (BSc) from the prestigious Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria in International Relations and an MSc. Degree in the same school. He has actively worked at various capacities as an academic of repute in the last 28 years, specifically he worked for Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and Monash University, Johannesburg. Currently, he holds a position as Deputy Director, School of Government Studies, North West University, Mafikeng – South Africa and recently appointed as an Honorary Professor at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) South Africa. His research interests span across several areas which are not limited to peace and conflict issues, social movements, environmentalism, peace advocacy and inter-ethnic harmony in local communities in Africa.