



## HUMAN RIGHT VIOLATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CONDITION OF SELECTED PERSONS RESIDENT IN OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

**IKENYEI N. Sandra (PhD)**

Department of Sociology, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria  
ngoziikenyei@yahoo.com

&

**NWADUKWE Helen Temi**

Department of Sociology, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria  
helennwadukwe@gmail.com

**Background:** The exploration of rich human and natural resources in Delta State degrades the soil, violate human right, as well as inflict degenerative health challenges on surrounding communities especially the slum dwellers.

**Objective:** The study has two core objectives. First, it highlighted human right violations and environmental health condition of selected slum dwellers in oil producing communities in Delta State. Secondly, it examined the attitudes of multinational companies and the government in mediating the consequences of the explorative activities.

**Methodology:** Explanation of core variables of study was anchored on Conflict and Development theories, as well as Health Belief Model. A total of 400 participants were sampled. Instruments of data collection and analysis were triangulated. Thus, data were gathered using questionnaire and the interview. However, quantitative data were analyzed with simple percentages, while chi-square was used to test hypotheses and content analysis applied to qualitative data.

**Results:** Findings revealed that there are wide spread evidence of oil spillage and gas flaring, condition which destroys the peoples source of livelihood, as well as altering their state of health. Concerned authorities, particularly multinational companies and the government have consistently failed to put in place measures that will ameliorate the challenges of environmental degradation and deterioration of health. Thus, dwellers suffer human right violations with an environment replete with decay and high rate of crime. They suffer severe depression, high blood pressure and seizures due to consumption of contaminated substances along with their food, herbs and water.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that, there is human right violations and poor environmental health condition of slum dwellers in oil producing communities in Delta Stat. These situations degenerate due to oil exploration. The lukewarm attitudes of multinational companies and the government in mediating the consequences of explorative activities amount to human right violation punishable by law. Unfulfilled expectations shape the attitudes of the slum dwellers and most aggrieved agitators.

**Unique Contribution:** The study detailed the predicament of some slum dwellers. Findings will guide policy makers in the formulation and execution of oil exploration and environmental related policies



**Key Recommendation:** The study recommends that government and multi-national companies should live up to their corporate social responsibility roles. Community heads should create modalities that enable equitable distribution of royalties. Those who neglect, exploit or abuse the rights of slum dwellers should be compelled to pay for damages.

**Word count:** 330

**Key words:** Environment, Health, Human-right-violation and Slum dweller.

## INTRODUCTION

The discovery and exploration of the rich human and natural resources in Delta State of Nigeria has led to an environment which is hazardous to human existence. Indeed, series of poorly managed activities degrades the soil as well as inflict degenerative health challenges on surrounding communities whose neighbourhoods gradually turn into slums with the people taking up a new but unfortunate tag of ‘slum dwellers’.

According to Akinwale (2024), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UNHS) defined a slum as “ a wide range of low-income settlements and/or poor human living conditions, which include the vast informal settlements that are quickly becoming the most visual expression of urban poverty” From the definition, it is obvious that slum dwellers live in abject poverty. Their suffering is further compounded by unregulated exploration activities which denigrate the environment, silt the soil thus rendering the region uninhabitable for living organisms (Ikenyei 2017).

More so, the onset of industrial scale exploration of mineral resources in Delta State, gave rise to wide spread of oil pollution and evidence of human right violation. The environment became replete with decay and high rate of crime (Akinwale 2024, Ikenyei & Lawal 2019). The poor health condition and level of poverty have been aggravated by series of oil spillage and conflicts in the slum and environs. This was well captured by Ikenyei (2017) in her work titled, “Dynamics of conflicts and criminal activities in Warri and environs, Delta State, Nigeria”. Although it is a fact that equipment age with time thus causing wear and tear which leads to spillage, however the intentional vandalization of oil equipment by aggrieved persons have led to molestation and mass slaughter of many Deltans, (Ikenyei 2017). This has been tagged as human right violation by international communities.

Apart from pollution and alteration of environmental health condition of these selected slum dwellers, the deprivation and alienation of these indigenous slum dwellers breeds anger and hatred against their perceived alienators. These have been exhibited by obstructing smooth operation in the region. The felt exploitation and violation of basic human rights have led to series of protest which resulted to more devastating conditions for the slum dwellers who are already suffering from limited access to basic facilities.

Ikenyei (2022) contended that unresponsive attitudes of multinational companies and the government in mediating the consequences of explorative activities in Delta state are not only an act of human right violation, but also represent a huge failure to perform their corporate social



responsibility, a situation that breeds hatred in the mind of the suffering masses. This they manifest as militants or Niger Delta Avengers (Ikenyei and Amaechi, 2020).

Although several researches have examined the socio-economic effects of oil exploration, few focused on environmental health and human right issues as they affect slum dwellers in Delta State, hence, this research primarily investigated human right violation and environmental health condition of selected residents or slum dwellers in oil producing communities in Delta State.

Findings will guide policy makers in the formulation and execution of oil exploration and environmental related policies.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In Nigeria specifically Delta State, there exist human right violation as a result of oil exploration activities. According to a recent report (2011), gas flaring has had known effects on the Delta people and their environment. For example, “noise pollution, itching and skin rashes, the discomfort generated by the light from 24/7, flaring, the black dust and soot those settle in people’s homes and on food and clothes undermine the quality of life and the right of the people to live in a healthy environment in which to fulfill their potential.

Regarding health, gas flaring causes acid rain, which acidifies the lakes and streams and damages crops and vegetation. It leads to corrosion of roofs. It is a known carcinogen which has affected human health, including causing miscarriages and congenital malformations, increasing the frequency of respiratory illnesses and cancer, amongst other ailments that have sent hundreds to an early grave. Its sulphur content leads to low farm yields, affecting the farming livelihood of the people.<sup>3</sup>

Gas flaring has been prohibited in Nigeria since 1984 when a law on gas re-injection came into effect. Since then, oil companies have been prohibited from engaging in routine gas flaring and can flare only with a special permit from the responsible minister. However, the requirements for this special permit are unknown. Shell’s flaring permit has not been made public, so it is impossible for local people to determine the grounds on which it was granted. Moreover, the fine for flaring gas is too low per cubic meter to act as a deterrent for oil companies.

Shell has promised to extinguish the flames as a result of pressure from the Nigerian people, government and environmental organizations. But Shell has not yet kept these promises, exerting its political and economic influence on the national government so that it acquiesces in shifting the goal posts. In reality, and according to a UNEP report (2011), Shell is not observing its own internal regulations or national regulations, and this makes imperative an international binding mechanism.

A campaign to end gas flaring, led by Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth (ERA/FoE), has been internationalized, culminating in a national court case brought by a coalition of international and local NGOs and the Iwherekkan community against Shell as a test case. The Federal High Court sitting in Benin City on 14 November 2005 ordered a stop to gas flaring, declaring it a “gross violation of the fundamental human rights to life and dignity, which include the right to a clean, poison-free, pollution-free healthy environment”.



Shell has displayed a total disregard for the Nigerian justice system, and no detailed phase-out scheme has ever been submitted (Ikenyei and Amaechi 2020). In spite of the long-standing laws against gas flaring in Nigeria, and because of shifting deadlines to end the practice, the activity continues, with serious health consequences for creek dwellers and all other people living nearby, hence the need for a higher order to restrain Shell and compel it to end gas flaring” (Anon 2024).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

For the explanation of core variables in the study, submissions are anchored on three relevant theories, namely Conflict theory, Development theory and Health Belief Model.

**Conflict theory:** In contrast to the functionalist approach which opined a beneficial and harmonious ecology, theoretical models in the conflict perspective focus on the way slum areas change according to exploration activities and specific decisions made by multinational companies, political and economic leaders (Anon 2014, Ikenyei 2017). These “decisions generally benefit the middle and upper classes” while exploiting the immediate indigenous slum dwellers who are mainly farmers, whose greater population constitute poor working lower classes (Ikenyei & Lawal 2019). Conflict theorist focus on gentrification—the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of sophisticated middle class or affluent experts with their company into already deteriorating areas whose activities often displaces indigenous farmers/artisans who are poorer residents. Wealthier oil experts buy or rent property the few available properties in the slum area whose 85% of his population are low- income or working-class neighborhoods, driving up property values and rent (Ikenyei & Akpotor2020). While exploration brings money into the hands of blighted developed regions, “it often comes at the expense of poorer, pre-gentrification residents slum dwellers who cannot managed degraded environment or afford increased rents and property taxes which befall them (Ikenyei 2017). There exists hegemony between slum dwellers who are struggling for survival and expatriate and their heavily armed officers. Degraded environment and unfulfilled promises occasion unhealthy agitations and confrontation.

**Health Belief Model:** is a psychological model developed by Rosenstock in 1950. The major focus of the model is that, the individual belief affects their attitude to health-related issues. They opined that perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived barriers, cues, perceived efficacy will push an individual to seek mediation (Ikenyei 2022). In Nigeria, individual health care routines are largely products of their environment. Majority of slum dwellers consult traditional and faith-based healing centers before proceeding to the hospital (Ikenyei 2017). Patients prefer to manage their challenges at home rather than face the draconian experiences found within the various health care outlets. With oil exploration and its negative consequences, environment derivatives such as herbs are destroyed. When health, sources of livelihood and environmental derivatives are destroyed the aggrieved are left with no other choice than to vent their anger on perceived cause of their woes. Hence, the rise of Delta Avengers and a host of others who fight for recognition and commensurate compensation arose, (Ikenyei & Akpotor 2020).

**Development theory:** According to W. Rostow, development is an improvement from crude state to a more refined state. Invariably with the influx of experts and their multinational company, there was supposed to be an improvement in the environment and the standard of living for indigenous



dwellers (Ikenyei 2023, Ikenyei and Amaechi 2020). Ironically, the dwellers environment degenerates with the onset of uncontrolled industrial scale exploration activities. These affect health and general standard of living of the people. With degraded environment, conflicts and repressive attacks, development becomes elusive for slum dwellers.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total of 400 participants were sampled. Data was gathered using questionnaire and the interview guide. Thus, instruments of data collection and analysis were triangulated. Tools for data analysis were contingency tables and simple percentage for quantitative data; chi-square test statistics was used for hypotheses testing; and content analysis was applied to qualitative data.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.**

S/N	VARIABLE LABEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>1</b>	<b>Age</b>		
	18-25	72	18
	26-35	101	25.25
	36-55	87	21.75
	56-68	64	16
	69-above	76	19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	196	49
	Female	204	51
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Education</b>		
	Primary	79	19.7
	Secondary	82	20.5
	B.Sc	105	26.3
	Post graduate	58	14.5
	Others	76	19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Income</b>		
	10-30	124	31
	31-50	90	22.5
	51-80	62	15.5
	81-110	58	14.5
	111-above	66	16.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Occupation</b>		
	Farmer	134	33.5
	Business	85	21.3
	Civil servant	87	21.7
	Oil workers	58	14.5



	Others	36	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>
6	<b>Religion</b>		
	Christian	162	40.5
	Muslim	72	18
	Traditionalist	145	36.3
	Atheist	18	4.5
	Others	3	0.75
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>
7	<b>Marital status</b>		
	Single	147	36.7
	Married	162	40.5
	Divorced	20	5
	Separated	18	4.5
	Cohabiting	53	13.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field work 2025

Findings revealed that total 96% of respondents reported that, there is wide spread evidence of oil spillage and gas flaring. They submitted that the condition destroys their source of livelihood as well altering their state of health. Concerned authorities failed to put in place measures that will ameliorate the challenges of environmental degradation and deterioration of health. Thus, dwellers suffer human right violation with an environment replete with decay and high rate of crime. They suffer severe depression, high blood pressure and seizures due to consumption of contaminated substances in food such as herbs and water. For fear of unrest and insecurity, many have developed high blood and majority die of hypertension.

A total of 86% of respondent reported that, gas flaring and the constant light it produces 24/7 causes' death of farm products. This situation impacts negatively on their sources of daily living. The black dust and soot from the smoke that settle on the roof, cloths and nose causes grievous damage. These undermine the right of the people for a clean environment and healthy living. The streams and all other river bodies were useful sources of drinking water, bathing room, storage facilities and for fermenting and processing of farm produce. All these have been intercepted by alteration and changes emanating from oil spillage and gas flaring.

The air pollution arising from equipment/gas emission has given rise to numerous cases of breathing/lung challenges such Asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD), pneumonia and pulmonary embolism. Majority now suffer these life-threatening ailments. Apart from pain which victims suffer, these challenges have cost implications. First, the sick person cannot perform their daily routine jobs. This affects output which invariably affects the individual and the community at large. Secondly, limited funds available slum dwellers are spent on drugs procurement. This is particularly so, because health care services are profit oriented in Nigeria, the sick pay heavily to recover from their ailment. The situation bites hard as they suffer from chronic diseases in a degraded environment. With no alternative choice, the people resolve to unconventional means of attaining their goal (survival) as situation becomes unbearable.



These scenarios create a hegemony and social unrest (Ikenyei, 2017 Ikenyei & Akpotor2020); a situation which leads to mass destruction of lives and properties. Because the environment is polluted and means of livelihood is destroyed, the aggrieved seek unconventional means of seeking redress. Thus, for decades there have been cases of equipment vandalization. This finding aligns with Ikenyei 2017 research findings. Also, scores of hostages taking abounds, because concerned authorities refused to do the needful, the aggrieved resort to pipe line vandalism and hostage taking. Also, the people equally resolve to oil theft to have a fair share of the resources explored in their domain. There are evidences of the existence of illegal refineries owned by members of aggrieved conglomerates. These persons divert crude oil, refine them and proceeds are appropriated by them. Unfortunately, majority lost their lives to counter attacks from heavily armed security operative. Many become handicapped as a result of loss of one or multiple many parts. The above illegal businesses have led to extermination and dislocation of many from their aboriginal homes (Ikenyei 2022).

The above situation is a clear case of human right violation. It is a scenario which depicts exploitation and alienation of the creek dwellers. This situation is a replica of collecting gold from a helpless child, then handing over acid to the child. Deltans like a child are helpless. They swim in rich human and natural resources, yet suffer the worst form of deprivation. They are inside ocean/river yet soap wants to destroy their eyes. They have abundant resources yet suffer inhuman acts. These grievances from these misgivings are displayed in unruly manner which they tag as militias or militant.

The respondents, (63%) revealed that the health condition of the creek dwellers is directly affected by the environmental condition. Majority of homes are now broken and young girls have dived into prostitution. Married women and young girls are lured into relating with rich oil workers there by abandoning their family. This denies the people right to peaceful and comfortable living. This finding is in tandem with Ikenyei & Lawal (2019) findings (Ikenyei & Lawal 2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that, there is human right violation and environmental health condition of slum dwellers in oil producing communities in Delta State degenerates due to oil exploration. The unresponsive attitudes of multinational companies and the government in mediating the consequences of the explorative activities, is an act which amount to human right violation punishable by law. Unfulfilled expectations shape the attitudes of most aggrieved agitators.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that government and multi-national companies should perform their corporate social responsibility roles. Thus, there should be adequate compensation, commensurate to the damage done to the environment. Community heads should create modalities that enable equitable distribution of royalties. Those who neglect and exploit or abuse the rights of slum dwellers should be compelled to pay for damages. Modalities should be put in place to check on the activities of multinational companies. Government should order a stop to gas flaring and declare it as gross violation of the fundamental human rights to life and dignity, which include the right to a clean, poison-free, pollution-free healthy environment.



## REFERENCES

- Anon (2014). Cases of environmental human right violation by Shell in Nigeria. Accessed 25/09/2024 from <https://www.cetim.ch/cases-of-environmental-human-rights-violations-by-shell-in-nigeria%E2%80%99s-niger-delta/>
- Akinwale O. P. (2024). Urban Slum in Nigeria: Ensuring healthy living condition.
- Ikenyei (2022). Health and human right. Available at [www.jstor.org/stable](http://www.jstor.org/stable). (Accessed 18/03/2024)
- Ikenyei N. S.(2017). Dynamics of conflicts and criminal activities in Warri and environs, Delta State, Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* Vol 15 (2) 48-62.
- Ikenyei N. S.& Akpotor J. (2020). Ethnic politics and development in Nigeria: Implication on Gender and health. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/ Egyptology* Vol 17: 3, 5501-5517.
- Ikenyei N. S. (2022). Health and social consequences of human right violations in rural Nigeria. *International social science Journal* Vol 72(245), 829-852.
- Ikenyei N. S.& Lawal H.M (2019). Forest and social control in Sapele, Okpe Kingdom, Delta State, Nigeria. *Lapai international Journal of Management and social sciences* 11(1). 154-16.
- Ikenyei N. S. (2017). Police and challenges of crime control in Uvwie community, Warri, Delta State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Health and Social inquiry* Vol 3 (1), 1-32.
- Ikenyei N. Sandra &Efebe V. Eseoghene (2020). The challenges of migrants: women as beast of burden in our today world. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* Vol 24 (4), 10998-11009.
- Ikenyei N. S & Akpotor J. (2020). Behavioural consequences of hawking in selected cities in Nigeria. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* Vol 24 (9), 5202-5212
- Ikenyei N. S., F. N. Amaechi (2020). Persons with disability and the 2030 agenda of sustainable development goals: the need for organized intervention through Adaptive clothing. *International Journal of Health and Social Inquiry* Vol 3(1), 1-13
- Ikenyei N S (2020). The dynamics of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Abraka, Delta State. *Global Journal of Applied Management and Social Sciences*Vol 20 (1), 147-156.
- Ikenyei N S (2022). Health and social consequences of human rights violations in Rural Nigeria. *International Social Science Journal* vol 72, 829-852.
- Ikenyei N S (2023). Social inequality and sustainable development in Africa. *Nigerian journal of social problems and social policy review*Vol3(1), 9-20.
- Ikenyei N S & Akpotor J. (2023). De-constructing inequitable access to health care services in Nigeria. *International Journal of health sciences*vol 6(S4) 12355-12369.
- Ikenyei N S & Urien J. O (2024). Socio-economic, psychological and health implications of restiveness and relocation of oil companies from Warri and Environs. *Nigerian journal of social problems and social policy review* Vol 4(1), 1-16.
- Ikenyei N.S. (2017). Dynamics of conflicts and criminal activities in Warri and environs, Delta State, Nigeria.*The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*Vol 15 (2) 48-62
- Ikenyei N.S. & Hussaini M.L (2022). Deforestation and systemic sustainability in Sapele, Delta State. *Dutse International Journal of Social & Economic Research*Vol 8(1) 188-197.
- Owoeye J. O. and Omole K. F. (2012). Built environment decay and Health situation of Slum dwellers in residential Cores of Akure, Nigeria. Accessed 10/10/2024 from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236735469\\_Built\\_Environment\\_Decay\\_and\\_Health\\_Situation\\_of\\_Slum\\_Dwellers\\_in\\_Residential\\_Cores\\_of\\_Akure\\_Nigeria](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236735469_Built_Environment_Decay_and_Health_Situation_of_Slum_Dwellers_in_Residential_Cores_of_Akure_Nigeria)