

*Review*

# Oil activities, unsustainable environment and the combative reactionism of women in the Niger Delta

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The Niger Delta is made up mainly of rural communities with the majority of the people depending mostly on fishing and farming for their livelihoods. The traditional division of labour gives the Niger Delta woman primary responsibility for providing for and managing the sustenance of the family household. Women depend mainly on the environment to eke out a living as they have little access to and control over land, education and skilled work. Years of oil exploration activities with frequent oil spillages have led to severe environmental degradation with resultant destruction of farmlands and aquatic flora and fauna. This has placed extra burden on women in the Niger Delta, as they have to strive even harder to meet their daily needs. In addition, women are also the least to be hired by the oil companies in the Niger Delta. Women thus, suffer a discrepant impoverishment that deflates their status vis-à-vis men. The effect of the environment on the women of the degraded Niger Delta communities includes a high level of poverty and reduction in economic activities.

**Key words:** Oil activities, women's reaction, Niger Delta.

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## INTRODUCTION

The environment is the cornerstone of human security, especially for people living in poverty. It is not only because their existence largely relies on subsistence activities, which depend on natural resources, but because they also perceive their well-being as tied to the environment in terms of livelihoods, health, vulnerability and the ability to control their lives. Poorer people are easily susceptible to changes in the environment, mostly because social, political and economic exclusion means they almost always have fewer choices about where they live. They bear the brunt of natural hazards, biodiversity loss and the depletion of forests, pollution (air, water and soil), and the negative impacts of industrial activities, as they impact on their potential for food security. The linkage between agriculture and rural economy is that livelihood security must be secured. This can only be

done through agriculture because livelihood is secured when it can cope or recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities, while not undermining the natural resource base. Indeed, development literature clearly shows that the environment is the basis for the sustenance and survival of man (Olagbaiye, 1990:1; Emeribe, 2000:209). Environmental resources give meaning to man's productive activities. For this reason, man's productivity depends on the quality of the environment. Thus, development cannot subsist upon a deteriorating environmental resource base. In support of this assertion, Brundtland (1984) deduced that people's livelihood security is based more or less exclusively on the use of natural resources. Therefore, management of natural resources for the present use, while not undermining the future use of such resources is very

important and critical. Several authors have documented the existence of substantial multiplier effects from agriculture to non-agriculture, especially in Asia, but also in sub-Saharan Africa (Hagblade et al., 2007).

The pervasive livelihood insecurity precipitated by the oil and gas extraction on the entire Niger Delta environment remains a major challenge to initiating and attaining a livelihood system across the region. Therefore, it is not possible to discuss sustainable livelihoods in the Niger-Delta without referring to oil extraction and its impacts on the environment. Studies have shown that non-timber forest products, such as firewood, snails, medicinal plants and spices, have significantly declined in recent years due to pollution and deforestation (CASS, 2003; NDHDR, 2006).

Until the advent of oil, a delicate balance existed between the people of the Niger Delta and its fragile ecosystem. Exploitation of natural resources was in the main, rudimentary and did not go beyond the search for medicinal herbs, fuel-wood, game, fish and construction materials. Environmental sustainability was maintained as available resources outmatched the needs of the people. Today, the Niger Delta environment has changed and continues to change rapidly. Oil and gas activities have infringed on the people and their environment, leading to the opening up of previously pristine ecosystems. This has resulted in alteration of habitats, biodiversity loss, deforestation and pollution (Amakiri, 2005). While natural hazards are responsible for some impacts on the environment, oil activities have no doubt aggravated the situation. A World Bank report (1990) observed that the oil industry, in the Niger Delta has both an urban and a rural presence, as oil wells are located throughout the rural areas. Chronic leaks have resulted in widespread destruction of fishing and agricultural resources and contributed significantly to the deforestation that have completely destroyed marine life in affected areas. The observation by the World Bank was also corroborated by Akobo (1998:10), when he stated that: "Most of the Niger Delta remains a shell even though Shell and the other multinational oil companies are still operating in the area". Pollution of farmlands, fishing streams, deforestation, corrosive erosion and other woes have all been traced to the oil exploration and production activities of the oil companies. This is because the oil companies do not observe best practices in their operations in the Niger Delta.

The oil companies operating in the Niger Delta have the worst records of environmental abuses in the world<sup>1</sup>. This is reinforced by the fact that Shell's operations in the Niger Delta that constitute only 14% of its oil production worldwide, account for over 40% of its oil spills worldwide (Gilbert, 2010). It is therefore not surprising that the Niger Delta is where by far, the majority of the people live in neglect and poverty and where women are the poorest of the poor (HRW, 2002, 2004, 2007). All these have given

rise to cyclic conflicts in the Niger Delta. Women suffer severe hardships during conflict as reports show that 90% of war casualties are mostly women (Women Watch, Fact Sheet 5, 2005) and the Niger Delta is no exception. Decades of militarisation have subjected women in oil host-communities to all kinds of violence. Women have been raped, maimed and murdered even in front of family members (Robinson, 1996). Husbands have also, been killed or maimed, creating greater burdens for most women as head of households. The Federal Office of Statistics (2006) welfare survey reported the Niger Delta as area having most households headed by women.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS**

Gender, as an analytical category, captures the complex matrix of social relationships within society (Rosaldo, 1980; UNPFA, 2003). Gender is the basis of structural inequality in all societies (Caprioli, 2005); it determines roles power relationships, responsibilities, expectations, and access to resources (UNPFA, 2003). Thus, gender is used as a benchmark to determine access and power, and is the rubric under which inequality is justified and maintained (Caprioli, 2005). Gender hierarchy "reinforces itself through system of rules and penalties; enforced in all aspects of life" (Grant, 1993:161). There are gender socially assigned tasks and obligations in all societies. It is the women's task to provide for the upkeep of the family in the Niger Delta (Onoge, 2002:6). Women in upland areas engage in farming of food crops such as; cassava, yam, maize, sweet potato, and in the past, cocoyam, while women in the riverine areas engage fish and gather sea foods; periwinkles, oysters, snails, shrimps, and crayfish. Women are thus, "food producers, procurers and preparers" (Okon, 2002:67). However, servile poverty, coupled with huge rise in women-headed households (Uchendu, 1995), women are forced increasingly to play active financial role in their families and are becoming wage earners (Sudarkasa, 2005:27). As such, beyond the food needs of the family, women produce or gather more for sale to augment family income. As Meagher (1999) opines, the tendency of men under economic pressures have been to transfer greater burden of household needs to women. Being mostly uneducated and poor, women rely on diverse forms of survival strategies with agriculture accounting for their main source of income and about 90% of family food needs (Weidemann, 1987; Picard, 1995; Moser 1996; Davies 1996a,b; UN-ECA, 2001). Indeed, in both rural and urban areas, the vast majority of the poor have individual household and community survival strategies that include myriad activities and a number of other mechanisms for coping in times of crisis (Chambers and

Conway, 1992; SIDA, 1995; Grown and Sebstad, 1989).

Since people usually find ways to meet their needs for survival, livelihood appears to better capture how people live, their actual priorities and main activities. The vital issues of concern are the extent that these activities meet immediate needs and their sustainability to also meet future needs (Carney, 1998). Sustainability has two main aspects; environmental and social sustainability. Environmental sustainability refers to fears over degradation, pollution and over-exploitation of non-renewable resources, while social sustainability involves the maintenance of livelihoods while protecting and boosting local capacities on which livelihoods depend (Chambers, 1995). Livelihood as a concept focuses on how individual household or groups make their living and their resources (Olujide, 2000). It reveals the activities that people perform to meet basic needs to generate income. The concept embraces not only the present availability of the means to make a living but also the security against unexpected shocks and crises that threaten livelihoods. Thus, livelihood is different from "work", which is a specific activity performed in exchange for payment. Though money is obtained for work, livelihood is engaged in the support of life; hence, livelihood may or may not involve money exchange. In the Niger Delta, women combine a variety of activities that yield both monetary and material returns to support livelihoods and their wellbeing. These activities are highly dependent on the environment (Omorodon, 2004); as a result, women mostly bear the brunt of environmental degradation (UNDP, 2002). This is why women are always ready to confront any situation considered inimical to the realisation of their livelihood, which explains their intense protest against oil activities. In the Niger Delta, protection of the environment is not a key factor for the oil companies, thus, they carry out their operations with impunity. Consequently, this has led to severe pollution of the environment with concomitant effects on livelihoods and well-being. Ramifications of oil activities in the Niger Delta environment form the next focus of the discussion.

### **Oil activities and ramifications on the Niger Delta environment**

The Niger Delta that Saro-Wiwa (1999:13-14) described as the heart and lungs of Nigeria produces about 85% of Nigeria's oil and has one of the most fragile ecosystems in the world. The effects of oil activities have been the focus of several studies given their consequence on the environment (Awobanjo, 1981; Onosode, 2003; Achudume, 2009). Most of the harmful effects are from two main sources; gas flaring and oil spillage. According to Gerth and Labaton (2004), about 56.6 million cubic metres of gas is flared in the Niger Delta daily. This is about 16% of the world's total gas (GGFR, 2002), which

can serve the cooking need of 320 million people (Goldenberg, 2000). The flares emit over 34 million tons of carbon dioxide and 12 million tons of methane annually (Shelby, 1996:28; World Bank, 1995, 2000/2001) and the largest contributor to global warming (Hunt, 2000). Annually, volume of gas estimated at US\$2.5 billion is flared daily in the Niger Delta (Osuoka and Roderick, 2005).

Furthermore, incessant oil spillages have accompanied oil activities in the region. The Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) put the volume of crude oil spilled in the region between 1976 and 2005 at about 3, 121, 909.8 barrels in about 9.107 incidents (Egberongbe et al., 2006). Independent researchers have dismissed the figures averring that they are three times higher (Grevy, 1995; Owolabi and Okwechime, 2007). Most of the spills are from pipeline and flow lines, which have the most damaging effects as, they are not immediately addressed due to delays in closing valves or back pressure flows (Orubima, 1983; Onosode, 2003; Osuoka and Roderick, 2005). In addition, clean ups are usually tardy and limited. As such, little oil is recovered, making pollution impacts more acute on the ecosystem (Kemedi, 2003). The effects are significant and include destroying mangrove forests, habitat and nursery of aquatic species (Duke and Burns, 1999; Egborge, 2000; Emuedo and Anoliefo, 2008), mangrove death through stunted roots growth (Emuedo and Anoliefo, 2008). This has severely impacted the region's biodiversity, fish stocks and marine life; denying women one of their major means of their livelihood, fishing. Also, total hydrocarbons in streams in most parts of the Niger Delta are 360 and 680 times the European Union's permissible levels (HRW, 1999). On land, impacted areas due to oil spills are unsuitable for farming over two decades later (Frynas, 2000:169). All these as have alienated women from their means of livelihoods stultifying their economic potentials.

### **Impacts of oil activities on women in the Niger Delta**

Agricultural practices constitute the main source of livelihood and income in rural Niger Delta. However, agricultural practices have been stultified by the negative impacts of oil activities (Emoyan et al., 2008). In the aquatic environment, the mangrove forests, the basic nurseries for all aquatic species have been negatively impacted. Niger Delta mangroves have the highest rate of depletion in the world (FAO, 2005). Light crude, produced, in the region impacts more adversely on mangroves than heavy crude (Proffitt et al., 1995; Duke et al., 2000) and regeneration of impacted mangroves take about 20 years (Duke and Burns, 1999). Unabated oil spills have led to poor water quality in the region. Studies have shown that poor water quality impacts on species composition, assemblages and distribution of fish

(Dance and Hynes, 1980; Boney, 1983; Kutty, 1987; Jones, 1987; Hart and Zabbey, 2005). All these have resulted in reduced fish stocks, reduced fish catches and virtual extinction of certain fauna in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, poor water quality often gives rise to high concentration of heavy metals (lead, copper, zinc) in water. The Niger Delta it seems is no exception. Common fish species in the region have been shown to bio-accumulate heavy metals at levels toxic to humans. These include tilapia (Godwin et al., 2011), bonga shad (Etesin and Nsikak, 2007), cat fish (Wegwu and Akaniwor, 2006), shrimp (Opuene, and Agbozu, 2008) among others.

On land, the impacts of oil pollution are no less deleterious. Udo and Fayemi (1975) showed that crude oil pollution reduces the germination of maize crop by 50% and yield by 92%. The impacts of oil spills are long lasting (Ekekwe, 1983) as impacted areas are still unsuitable for farming over two decades later (Frynas, 2000:169). According to Inoni et al. (2006) this has depressed crops yield and income for farmers, as oil spill of about 10% reduces crop yield by about 1.5% and income by over 5%. Several studies have also linked gas flaring to decline in agricultural produce in the Niger Delta (Alakpadia, 2000; Daudu, 2001). Indeed, Salau (1993) and Adeyemo (2002) reported a 10% decrease in crop yield at a distance of 1000 metres, 45% decrease at a distance of 600 metres and 100% loss of yield at a distance of 200 metres from a gas flare sites. Gas flaring has also been associated with highly reduced yield in sweet potato (Udoinyang, 2005); cassava/yam (Odjugo, 2007); melon, a popular seed vegetable by 85.7, 82.1, 75 and 32% at 500, 1, 2 and 5 km, respectively (Odjugo, 2010). Women in the Niger Delta do most of the fishing in shallow coastal waters and also do most of the farming for food crops in the Niger Delta. It could be clearly seen therefore that women bear the most of the indirect impacts of oil activities; reduced fish catches, reduced crop yield and hence income or denial of access due to pollution. It is obvious from the foregoing that the women's dependence on the environment (land or water) for their livelihoods have acutely stultified and constricted by oil activities in the Niger Delta. Thus, faced with no alternatives due to limited education, women in the Niger Delta have no other space to manoeuvre, hence their combative reactionism to oil activities in defence of the environment.

### **Women's combative reactionism in the Niger Delta**

Since the advent of oil as a source of power in Nigeria, its social relations of production have tended to alienate local people with women mostly affected. In addition, the interaction between the oil companies and their host communities breeds a variety of contradictions that reflect

the contour of power that enriches the global community, while impoverishing local people especially women. Women have been alienated from the social relations of oil production and have been hardest hit by environmental impacts of oil activities (UNDP, 2002). In farming and fishing especially, oil activities with associated pollution have constricted the economic space for women. Furthermore, the politics of oil and its commoditisation of the environment also exclude the rural women from its labour needs, as, they are often, not accorded formal education (Turner and Oshare, 1993). Thus, the power relations spawned by oil politics, subject women to "relations of exclusion" that is also reflective of the Niger Delta environment. This has fed into resistance, through which local women have blocked global extraction until it attends to local demands for restitution. Protests by women groups in oil-host communities against the activities of the oil multinationals in the Niger Delta began in Ogharefe in 1984 against a US oil company Pan Ocean (Turcotte, 2002:1). The objectives of the protest like all others that later followed in the Niger Delta were predicated on the women's demands for oil companies to improve the economic, environmental, and social conditions of the oil-host communities. These demands surrounded issues of employment and the provision of social amenities:- roads, water, health facilities and electricity. When Pan Ocean failed to answer them, a mass of singing and dancing women laid siege on the company, halting their operations (Turner and Oshare, 1993; Lewis, 1998; Turcotte, 2002:1-3, 15-16, 35). Upon hearing that the managing director of the company had arrived from Lagos, the women removed all their clothes. The sight of thousands of naked women of all ages was too much for the visiting official who immediately fled the area. The demands of the women were met almost immediately by the company. This protest stimulated other women oil-related protests:- Ekpan, Escravos, Warri.

### **The Ekpan women's Revolt**

Historically, lands are owned and controlled by men in the Niger Delta, and due to the topography land is scarce. As a result, women have intensely struggled to access farms or fishing areas. Oil activities have exerted further pressure by its virtual sequester of most lands for oil production and erection of processing facilities that are built on erstwhile arable lands and fishing grounds. This has exerted acute pressure on agricultural practices; farming and fishing (Hutchful, 1985:51; Turner and Badru, 1985). This has been further exacerbated by the operational methods of the oil companies that have severely damaged the environment; harming agricultural practices. Thus, as it were, with their backs turned to the wall, the women violently reacted to the harrowing situation foisted

on them by oil activities.

On Monday, August 25, 1986, at 5 a.m., a large crowd of women protesters estimated at about 10,000 from Uvwie clan overwhelmed the premises of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Refinery, Petrochemicals Plant and the Pipelines and Products Marketing Pump station, all located at Ekpan. The throng was made up of women of all age groups including the very old (Daily Times (Nigeria), August 28, 1986:3; Sunday Telegraph (Warri), August 31, 1986:1). The women who were chanting war songs carried placards some of which read: "Give us Social Amenities," "Review all forms of employment within the Petrochemical," and "Our sons, daughters and husbands are qualified for key posts within the Petrochemical" (Daily Times (Nigeria), August 28, 1986:3). They also demanded preferential employment opportunities for their people threatening mass stripping if their demands were not met. Thousands of the women attempted to break into the premises of the Petrochemicals Plant. The women blocked all access routes to the three projects, while their men laid ambush armed with "dangerous" weapons, with "possible attack in mind should the women be molested" (Sunday Telegraph (Warri), August 31, 1986). All activities at the sites of the three projects were halted. Workers could not reach their offices. Large numbers of tankers were prevented from loading fuel for distribution to filling stations. A team of men from the Nigerian Police Force led by CSP G.A. Olatunbosun was unable to disperse the angry women (Sunday Telegraph (Warri), August 31, 1986).

It was not until about 2:30 p.m. that the women agreed to hold discussions with a management team from NNPC, made up of the managers of the affected companies. The women who denied access to the meeting to all men from the community were represented by three of the leaders. The meeting was adjourned at about 7 p.m. after over four hours to enable the NNPC team meet with its Managing Director and the Federal Minister of Petroleum Resources. The women continued their barricade while the meeting lasted, thus crippling oil operations in the region for the whole day. The women demanded feedback and positive response within two weeks failing which they would resume their action. Exactly two weeks later on Monday, September 8, 1986, the next meeting took place between the NNPC and the Uvwie community at the Uvwie King's Palace in Effurun. However, unlike the first meeting of August 25, 1986 Uvwie Community representation was male dominated; composed of seven chiefs, one evangelist and two women. As Ihonybere (1991) opines, this male encapsulation of women's struggles implies the takeover of corruption and loss of the political content of women's struggles to the economic interests of chiefs and elites. It was indeed revealed during the meeting that the King and his chiefs had enjoyed patronages without the knowledge of the people (Oshare, 1986). The meeting ended with the NNPC

promising to embark on aggressive community development with greater collaboration to avoid future confrontations. It was under this seemingly success by the Ekpan women that the combined Ijaw and Itsekiri women protest took place in Escravos.

### **Ijaw and Itsekiri women's protest**

The situation at Ekpan is also true for oil-host communities in the Niger Delta. But for the Ijaw and Itsekiri communities near Chevron's Escravos, export terminal their situation got worsened when besides fishing and farming, oil pollution also deprived them of clean water. For women, this meant increased burden as they have to trek even longer distance to get water. All appeals to Chevron for help fell on deaf ears. Thus, in 2002, Ijaw and Itsekiri women staged a mass protest against Chevron (INDYMEDIA, 2002:1-3; Okpowo and Adebayo, 2002:1-4; A.I, 2003:1-9).

This protest was considered most remarkable of all women protests against the foreign oil multinationals in the region due to the international media attention it received and its 10 day long duration coupled with the threat of the women to strip naked (Branigan and Vidal, 2002:8).

About three hundred Ijaw and Itsekiri women, angry at the lack of employment, lack of infrastructure and environmental despoliation by the oil multinational, (TWNF, 2002) occupied Chevron's exploration site. Around the same time, women from Ilafe and also some others from Ijaw and Itsekiri paralysed activities at the operational headquarters of Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC). To persuade the women to vacate the site, Chevron made a pledged to improve community development, promised employment to 25 people for five years and economic empowerment through the set-up of poultrys and fish farms (Branigan and Vidal, 2002:8).

These promises were never kept by the oil company, and social conditions in the region continue to worsen. In 2003, the women again protested with about 600 women of various ages besieging the oil facilities; taking about 700 oil workers of various nationalities hostage (Jesudasan, 2003:1-2).

As in all previous protests, the demands of the women centred on employment for their husbands, children and economic empowerment in the face of livelihood displacement due to the negative effects of oil activities (Jesudasan, 2003).

This time some of their demands were met, thus, some success was achieved by the women. However, as we shall see, this was the last time that women mass protests achieved any success.

### **Women protests and repression**

So far, mass protests by women because of the promises

they exerted albeit tokens were regarded as successful. However, not all women mass protests were and by the late 1990s matters changed. It seems that the success of earlier women's protests were due to certain factors:- non involvement of the state, circumstances (Pan Ocean was indebted to the state at the time), international media exposure (the threat of stripping focused the world media on the Chevron siege) and perhaps, dependent on the company involved and volume of oil produced. This last point appears to be of relevance as the state appears to be extremely sensitive and responds to protests with severe repression where Shell is the target. Indeed it could be argued that as pioneer and the highest crude oil producer (about 45%), Shell is privileged by the Nigeria state. This is exemplified by strong arm response of the state to issues involving Shell peaceful or violent environment.

The repressive tendency of the state to protests targeting Shell can be seen by a Shell flow station manager's directive to security services to quell a peaceful protest at Umuechem that resulted in the burning and looting of over 495 houses and the death of over 80 persons (mostly women and children) in 1990 (Ibeanu, 2000). This was also the case at Choba in 1993 where security services at Shell's directive quelled a peaceful protest by razing houses, destroying several properties and capping it by raping of over 30 females (mostly girls). In like manner Shell was also at the centre of the crisis involving some communities that led to the unprovoked Joint Military Task Force (JTF) attack on Odioma in 2005 that destroyed the town, killed 750 persons (women and children), while over 3000 others were arrested (Torulagha, 2005). Whilst it may be argued that women were not specially targeted in these operations, what is not in doubt is the fact that the oil companies became rather very vicious in their response to women mass protests, with the active support as it were of the state. This point is illustrated with two women mass protests in Warri involving Shell and Chevron in 2002.

### **Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo women's protest**

On August 8, 2002, over 3000 women from the three ethnic groups in Warri; Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri for the first time simultaneously carried out peaceful protests at the gates of the operational headquarters of the two major oil companies in Warri, Shell and Chevron. The protesting women arrived at the gates of the operational headquarters of both companies at about 6:30am and calmly sat on the ground. They waited quietly for an address by the oil companies' officials but they were ignored. At about 6.30p.m, over 12 h after the women arrived at the gate of both companies, a joint team of soldiers and mobile policemen arrived simultaneously at both companies and started to beat up the women

without any provocation, warning nor where they given any time to disperse. The security forces launched the attack throwing tear gas and shooting sporadically in the air. The combined forces of the security services came towards the gates of Shell from inside the company premises and threw tear gas at the women, while shooting rapidly as they approached. When they got to where the women were sitting, which included elderly women and women with babies strapped on their backs they began to whip, kick and beat them with "koboko" (a whip made of twisted animal skin) and the butts of their guns.

No official from either of the oil companies, Shell or Chevron consented to discuss with the women during the period of the peaceful protest. The women were simply brutally dispersed without an opportunity to dialogue with the representatives of the companies. Firsthand account of the incidents detailed the brutality:

*"One 70 years old protester named Titi Omafor was caught at the gate of Shell by one soldier who started shaking her violently, while at the same time kicking her viciously on both her legs. After the beating she was dumped on the ground, where she laid helplessly unable to move her lower limbs. She was found later by some younger women who managed to spirit her away from the scene and took her to an herbal home for treatment, as she was unable to afford normal hospital fee. Mama like the other women heard no warning prior to the brutal attack".*

*"One of the women that took part in the protest at Chevron gate was a 45 years old Itsekiri community women leader named Elisabeth Ebido. She was repeatedly beaten by four members of the combined security forces deployed to Chevron with the butt of their guns. At a point, one soldier held her very tightly while another whipped her viciously. Later, she was knocked to the ground where the whipping continued while at the same time she was ordered to run. According to the one soldier, she was selected for special VIP treatment because she was one of the leaders of the women".*

It may be argued that Shell, due to its colonial origin and pioneer status, has been repressive and exploitative in its relation with the people of the oil-host communities; thus, its treatment of the women narrated above is not strange. However, the same cannot be said of the behaviour of Chevron that in the past amicably settled with women protesters, as was the case with the women protesters at Escravos. We can therefore, see clearly that the oil companies became rather very vicious in their response to women mass protests after some initial successes.

### **Concluding remarks**

Women's protests in the Niger Delta signalled the onset

of resistance against oil activities in the Niger Delta. Though initial protests were successful, later protests were brutally repressed. Women protests arose from constriction of their means of livelihoods by environmental despoliation from oil activities. Women constitute the bulk of the marginalised, landless, least educated and resource-poor members of society. Thus, as providers for the family and lacking education women rely mostly on the environment for the family food needs and also to earn some income. Agriculture, fishing and related activities constitute their major sources of livelihood in the Niger Delta. Therefore, for the women, the environment is a natural asset and livelihood building block that is vital for sustaining the family. As a result, environmental despoliation has meant for women acute hardship; high level of poverty and diseases. This has accounted for the combative reactionism of women to oil activities in the Niger Delta, because the nexus between environment, agriculture and livelihood in the Niger Delta represents an important variable in the context of survival of the people.

## Notes

1. In the United States and elsewhere, produced water is either reinjected for recovery or into disposal wells and drilling mud land filled by the oil companies. However, in the Niger Delta, oil companies constantly dispose of wastes from oil drilling directly into fresh-water bodies (Nwankwo and Irechuwu, 1981). Also, no Environmental Assessment Impact (EIA) is carried out before pipelines are laid in the Niger Delta (Greenpeace, 1994). However, for its pipeline from Stanlow in Cheshire to Moss Moran in Scotland, 17 different environmental surveys were commissioned by Shell even before a single turf was cut... A detailed Environmental Assessment Impact (EIA) covered every length of the (pipeline) route. Also, besides taking measures to avoid lasting disfigurement, the route was diverted severally to accommodate environmental concerns (Greenpeace, 1994). It has thus, been argued that the oil companies' excesses in the Niger Delta are due to their alliance with the Nigerian state. For more on the activities of oil companies and their unholy alliance with successive military and civilian regimes, see *Where Vultures Feast* (Okonta and Douglas, 2001) and *Green Backlash* (Rowell, 1996). Further information can also be found at [www.seen.org](http://www.seen.org) and *Project Underground* at [www.moles.org](http://www.moles.org).

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