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Technical Report on Harmful Impact of Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil on the People and Environment of the Igbomatoru Community, Bayelsa, Niger Delta, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is blessed with crude oil in an abundance, which makes it one of the largest oil producers in Africa. Illegal crude oil bunkering is a regular activity in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria. The trend of illegal bunkering of crude oil activities in the Niger Delta has turned out to be a key concern to the people, government, and the international body. This makes it deem fit to carry out an assessment of the continued negative impact of vandalism, crude oil theft, and illegal bunkering of oil production activities in the Igbomatoru community in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area (SILGA), Bayelsa, Niger Delta area. This report critically examines the negative impact of vandalism and crude oil theft, negative impacts of illegal bunkering of crude oil activities in the community, and finding lasting possible solution to the problem of illegal bunkering of crude oil in the Igbomatoru community. Based on the investigation, some recommendations have been made, including that the government should promote a kick-start of cellular refinery programme to close the refining gap with strong local participation, provide legitimate employment opportunities, make better use of surveillance techniques, youth empowerment programmes should be carried out through vocational training, government should clean-up the degraded sites, government should give free education for the youths and children in the community, and government ought to promptly arrest and prosecute offenders of crude oil theft.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major sources of the world's energy happened to be crude oil (Wu and Chen, 2019). Nigeria has a large deposit of crude oil, with proven reserves of 28.2 billion barrels, making it one of the largest oil producers in Africa (Reuters, 2014; Elwerfelli and Benhin, 2018). The first discovery of crude oil in commercial oil well in Nigeria was in 1956 at the Oloibiri community in Bayelsa State, Niger Delta area. Niger Delta area currently has about 355 onshore and 251 offshore oil fields (NNPC, 2019). More than 75% of the country's national revenue is generated from crude oil exports (OPEC, 2019). Based on the trend of illegal bunkering of crude oil activities that is going on in Niger Delta, it has turn out to be a key concern to the people, government, and the international body. This makes it deem fit a term of researchers to carry out an assessment of the continued negative impact of vandalism, crude oil theft, and illegal bunkering of oil production activities in the Igbomatoru community in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area (SILGA), Bayelsa, Niger Delta area. Some of the issues to address are;

- The negative impact of vandalism and crude oil theft.
- The negative impacts of illegal bunkering of crude oil activities in the community.
- Effective moves of security agencies to stop illegal bunkering of crude oil.
- Prosecution of offenders.
- Finding lasting possible solution to the problem of Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil.

What is Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil

The word illegal bunkering of crude oil refers to every form of stealing crude oil, which usually includes the smuggling and diversion of oil (Campbell, 2015). Normally, a group of welders are recruited to puncture the pipelines or well head at night, preparing the way for the others to steal the crude oil, which can be transported later to elsewhere to be refined or sold (Ugwuanyi, 2013; Boris, 2015). Illegal bunkering of crude oil is simply an unauthorized loading of crude oil into ships that proceed from all acts smuggling and diversion of crude oil (Boris, 2015). This business involves the different local militant groups in creeks, commodity traders, military personnel, international businessmen, and some indigenous oil companies (Bodo, 2019; Ogunmade and Uwaezuoke, 2013; Olateju, 2013; Vidal, 2013). Every player in this business has their peculiar roles. The local militant youths in the creeks handle the cutting and tapping of crude oil from the transported pipes and load it in tankers and barges under the protection of the military, and the international businessmen manage the marketing of the product and money laundering processes (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013; Asuni, 2009; Boris, 2015). The friendly connection between the operatives of illegal oil bunkers has been reported to be a quiet action since it involves some government personnel, oil company staffs, and some strong businessmen outside and within Nigeria (Izeze, 2013; Olateju 2013; Asuni, 2009; Katsouris and Sayne, 2013). The constant act of illegal oil bunkering

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because of its high profitability has led to the massive devastation of the entire Niger Delta environment (Boris, 2015). Figure 1 shows schematic flow chart of Nigeria's onshore oil industry, both legal and illegal.

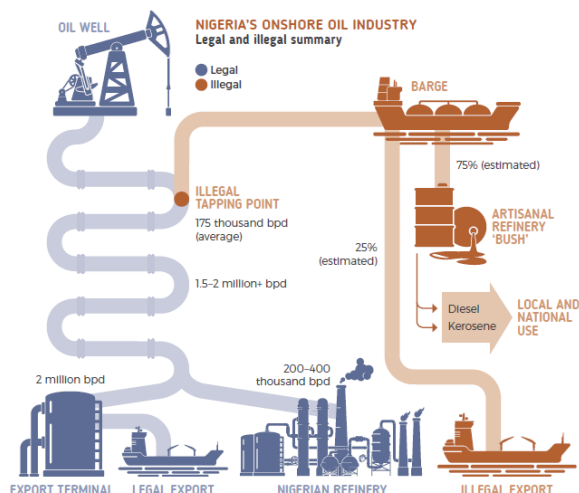


Figure 1: Schematic flow chart of Nigeria's onshore oil industry, both legal and illegal (Robin *et al.*, 2020).

Theft of Crude Oil in the Niger Delta Area

The manifestation of oil theft, also known as bunkering in Niger Delta begins around late 1970s to early 1980s, that was the period of military rule. Some top military personal was in the business for the purpose of enriching themselves and maintaining political stability forcefully (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013). However, the illegal bunkering of crude oil activity took a new turn with the advent of agitation for resource control by Niger Delta indigenes and the emergence of youth militancy (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013; Ikelegbe, 2005). At the beginning of the agitations, the primary objective was political, the people of the province requesting for an increase in the derivation fund (a particular percentage of oil rents accrued to the federal government). But when the government was unable to *meet all* their demands, many of the youths in the region took up arms against the government and engaged in criminal activities, such as kidnapping, destruction of oil facilities, oil theft and sea piracy (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013; Ikelegbe, 2005). There are three classes of youths who engage in illegal bunkering of crude oil;

- The jobless or unemployed. These class of youths just want to make a living.
- The second class of youths are those who are being sponsored by influential Nigerians such as the military, police, contractor, oil company workers, and politicians to get paid.
- The third group of youths are the organized militants (the warlords), who are greedy and needed oil money by all means. They siphoned the oil by blowing the pipes using various devices or instruments.

Ikelegbe (2008), said, the third class of youths are majorly responsible for theft of crude oil in Niger Delta area. The warlords gained access to funds with which they

acquired weapons, built camps, and strengthened their membership (Obi, 2010). They were able to operate with or without the support of political patrons (Watts, 2007). Therefore, it can be said that oil theft occurs in the Niger Delta as part of the violent escalation of the political agitation of the people of the Niger Delta and it persists as a financial mechanism for established criminal groups. When the local people see that there is a lot of money in the illegal bunkering of crude oil business, most of the youths, men, women, and even children join in the business in order to put food on their table.

The Main Causes of Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil

- Marginalization and neglect.
- Poverty and unemployment.
- Weak institutional structure.
- Corruption and bad governance.

METHODOLOGY

Data's were obtained through desk review of existing literatures online on illegal bunkering of crude oil in Niger Delta, Nigeria, illegal bunkering trend, and impact of illegal bunkering of crude oil on the environment. And also, participants were engaged in an interview in one on one bases of one of the major community (Igbomatoru) that get involved in the business of illegal bunkering of crude oil in Bayelsa State. This research was conducted in Igbomatoru Community, SILGA, Bayelsa State. About 180 persons (both males and females) were interviewed from the community from 18 and 90 years old. About 60 persons from each of the age groups of 18 - 30, 31 - 50, and 51 - 90 years were interviewed, and their responses to effects on illegal bunkering of crude oil on human health, and its environment were evaluated. The justification for this study is to establish a trustworthiness of the findings on the causes and effects on illegal bunkering of crude oil in Igbomatoru community.

Operational Mechanisms Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil

When the crude oil is being transported from the point it was siphoned to the camp of refining, the crude oil is loaded into a metal pot. A burner or fire is then lit underneath the metal pot, heating the crude oil and causing it to turn into vapour. In order to condense the vapour into petroleum products like gasoline, diesel, and kerosene, it is then cooled in a condensation unit. The condensation unit is typically a water bath composed of wood or metal material, and immersed in a cement coated iron pipe tube. The liquid products are collected in jerri-cans containers and it's being sold out. The major products from illegal bunkering of crude oil are diesel, petrol, and kerosene. The products gotten from crude oil in illegal bunkering are commonly referred to as kpofire (Bodo, 2019).

Key Findings

Negative Impacts of Vandalism and Crude Oil Theft

- Vandalism and crude oil theft causes spillage, which cause massive destruction of the environment. It destroys farmlands and the water bodies, which leads to habitat loss, decreasing arable land for cultivation.

- It also brings about groundwater contamination of crude oil, the devastation of rural land, fishery and domesticated animals are destroyed.

Negative Impacts of Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil Activities in the Community

Social Impact

The social impact of the illegal bunkering of crude oil is at the heart of the paradox. While environmental damage has made traditional livelihoods; fishing, farming, etc. unviable. The artisanal oil refining and the oil industry are now the major economic drivers of the Niger Delta region.

Health Impact

Health impacts are complex in the lives of the people living in Igbomatoru community. Local residents complain of breathing and sight difficulties, it means, smoke has affected most of their sight and they cannot see very well. The people said, sometimes it is very difficult to breathe because of the carbon in the air, so this affects almost every one of us. Artisanal refining is exceptionally dangerous for camp workers. Fractional distillation of crude is achieved by heating crude in large pots on an open fire. Major explosions and fires have resulted from this artisanal practice, and has claim so many lives, apart from the long period health effects of ingestion, absorption and inhalation of hydrocarbons. Figure 2 shows an illegal bunkering camp worker with burn injuries.



Figure 2: Illegal bunkering camp worker with burn injuries (Robin *et al.*, 2020).

Educational Impact

The amount of money that can be earned has affected school attendance. In Igbomatoru community, many primary and secondary school pupils and students

abandoned their education and took up artisanal oil refining when it was at its peak. The interviews showed widespread evidence of school attendance issues. The people said, some teachers that were posted to the community left their job and joined bunkering. So, the school system in this community changed because of the bunkering. The schools stopped operating, both primary and secondary schools. Even the small children were not going to school by then. There was no school, everybody was busy in the business, doing bunkering.

Impact on Livelihoods and Living Standards

The people of Igbomatoru community have very few conventional and legal employment opportunities. About 90% of the people living in the community are jobless. Power and infrastructure are out of their community. They only depend heavily on generators. Over 85% of the people in the community that was interviewed says, poverty or economic necessity are the principal drivers of the illegal bunkering of crude oil in the community. Though, Artisanal refining also helps to bridge the gap of refined fuel shortages. Many people depend on kerosene to cook their foods, which is a major artisanal refined product.

Impact on the Community by Lawlessness

It has generated significant criminal activities in the community. The elders and traditional leader no longer have the power and authority they once had. Many actors in the artisanal sector are peaceful, because ownership of light arms is not uncommon. They use small and light weapons to enforce control over their areas of operation and resist security agents. The growth of the illegal oil sector has also led to a rise in prostitution.

Environmental Impact

The bunkers predominantly interfere with pipelines to steal oil but often leave behind spills as a consequence.



Figure 3: An abandoned polluted site of illegal artisanal oil refinery in Igbimotoru community (Afeno, 2022).

Everyday life of the indigenous people has been strongly influenced by the oil waste left behind by bunkers. Figure 3 shows an abandoned illegal artisanal oil refinery in community.

Impact on Land and Farming

The spilt oil on the land has severely affected the delicate ecosystem of the wetlands, which are traditionally mangrove and farmland. Most of their farmlands and mangrove are polluted by crude oil as a result of illegal bunkering of crude oil. They cannot engage themselves in farming activities any longer.

Impact on Water and Fishing Activities

One of the largest problems caused by the oil waste is pollution seeping into the water supply of the community. Pollution has affects the rivers, creeks, and swamp severely. Majority of the people depend on the water from river, creeks, and swamp in drinking and cooking, but they can't use it again because of pollution. As a result of pollution, they cannot engage themselves in fishing activities.

Effective Moves of Security Agencies to Stop Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil

The federal government of Nigeria is not folding its arms on the decay arising from oil theft and bunkering in Nigeria. Government has involved some of the security personnel (Joint Task Force (JTF)) to guard the oil installation pipelines. They have closed down more than 50 illegal bunkering camps. Figure 4 shows an illegal artisanal oil refinery destroyed by the JTF.



Figure 4: An illegal artisanal oil refinery destroyed by the JTF (Conflict Briefing, May 2022).

Prosecution of Offenders

The government has not Prosecuted any offender in the community. When security agents come around, the bunkers always make their way out by bribing them in order to run away.

Finding Lasting Possible Solutions to the Problems of Illegal Bunkering of Crude Oil Creation of Job Opportunities for the Youths in the Community

The government of Nigeria must consciously come up with programmes that can massively engage the Niger

Delta youths without any form of bias, irrespectively of their educational qualification or social status.

Monitoring of the Whole Process of Oil Exploration by the Government

Illegal oil bunkering can be eradicated through intense monitoring and follow-up of all the operations of oil exploration. If the government is fully involved in all processes of oil lifting and distribution, every loop holes can be detected.

Environmental Education and Policy Implementation

Environmental education can help in solving the problem of illegal bunkering of crude oil as it will create awareness of the consequences of such actions. It will enable an individual to take action that will sustain the environment. Also, it will make the people to be environmentally friendly and choose not to act or engage in any activity that will destroy the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote a kick-started cellular refinery programme to close the refining gap with strong local participation.
- Combine 'cellular' refinery programmes with alternative livelihood projects.
- Provide legitimate employment opportunities.
- Make better use of surveillance techniques.
- Youth empowerment programmes should be carried out through vocational training.
- Environmental education for people in the region.
- Government should clean-up the degraded sites.
- Government should provide free education to the youths and children in the community.
- The government should promptly arrest and prosecute offenders of crude oil theft.

CONCLUSION

It is an established fact that illegal bunkering of crude oil, oil theft and pipeline vandalization does not only exist, but a major source of funding various criminal activities in Igbomatoru community. The unlawful petroleum processing plants that are scattered all over the community has destroyed the streams and rivers, and creeks, which are the sources of drinking water and fishing activities to the people, resulting in many waterborne sicknesses and diseases among the people. Unfortunately, the devastation of the location has left many of the people in the community jobless and hopeless as their primary source of livelihood (farming and fishing) no longer exists. Illegal bunkering of crude oil is capable of incapacitating the economy of Nigeria overtime, as the country is solely dependent on the revenues from petroleum for its daily expenditures. The government of Nigeria can end the operation of illegal bunkering of crude oil by developing the Igbomatoru community, and without any bias, and create massive employment for the youths in the community.

Acknowledgment

Terms of Reference of the Research Group

- To restore and sustain the Igbomatoru community from negative impacts from illegal bunkering of crude oil.

- Assess the challenges and come up with a clear roadmap of guide to find a possible lasting solution to the problem.

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