

OIL VANDAL AND BUNKERING IN NIGER DELTA REGION

BY

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Abstract

Despite the fact that the Niger Delta area contributes significantly to the country's GDP, its rural villages are poorly undeveloped, and its residents are among the poorest in the country. Nigeria is Africa's second-largest petro-state after South Africa, with an official oil production number of 2.4 million barrels per day; it earns billions of dollars in petroleum income. Scholars have highlighted one evidence that the country may be producing more than the official total, while the remainder is lost due to the illicit operations and manipulations of criminal cartels engaged in oil theft. Using the queer ladder theory as a theoretical framework, the research identified the elements that have contributed to the region's increasing prevalence of oil bunkering. Based on the findings, the research made recommendations, including that the government clean up the environment as soon as possible so that those who rely on it for survival can have a means of livelihood while also contributing to the nation's economy, as the region's development crisis has been linked to the production of crude oil.

Keywords: Oil production, Petroleum income, Illicit operations, Criminal cartels, Oil theft, Oil bunkering, Queer ladder theory, Environmental degradation, Introduction

Introduction

Nigeria was originally the world's fifth biggest oil producer, but it is now the 13th largest owing to many technical catastrophes that continue to disturb its production output, as well as the worldwide decrease in oil and gas prices since the third quarter of 2014. (CIA, 2018). The recent drop in Nigerian petroleum product production owing to sabotage and vandalism has caused significant issues to the external balance and government budget. These two structures (vandalism/sabotage) of oil facilities are regarded as a big issue that has a considerable impact on Nigeria's income streams. According to statistics, the Nigerian government loses roughly 300,000 barrels of oil every day as a consequence of oil pipeline vandalism (Umar & Othman, 2017). As a result, this loss is in the billions of dollars, and it has a severe impact on the region's socioeconomic growth.

This study seeks to discuss the reasons of illegal bunkering and oil pipeline sabotage in Nigeria's Niger Delta area. The study explores many fallacies about vandalism and sabotage in the context of environmental degradation and oil and gas extraction operations. These aspects are: Oil Bunkering (OB), Oil Scooping/Vandalism (OS), and Environmental

Hazard/Loss of Life. However, the study begins with a conceptual definition of the meanings of oil vandalism (OV) and oil sabotage (OS) in connection to environmental degradations. The aspect and construct in this paper are discussed with the intention of highlighting the players of the deliberate act of sabotage and vandalism and to symbolize the root influencing factors and causes of the act, while ignoring the positive benefit of the outcomes on the community's livelihood structure.

Methods

This study uses a desk-based approach, key community interviews, and representatives of environmental expertise from the oil and gas sectors, as well as representatives from an oil spill-related agency, to answer the question, "What are the root causes, influencing factors of sabotage, vandalism, and oil theft (bunkering) in the Niger Delta, Nigeria?" According to documented data, the bulk of environmental damages in South-South Nigeria are caused by third-party actions (i.e., around 60% of oil spills are caused by third-party intervention) (Shell, 2017). The main community members, as well as officials from oil and gas and oil spill-related agencies, were purposefully chosen for the interview talks.

Participants include environmental experts, engineers, community welfare officials, environmental activists, scientists, and community elders who have relevant experience for the study subject under examination and are deemed suitable. The following section summarizes the literature.

Literature Review

3.1 Concept of Vandalism and Sabotage

The concepts of oil pipeline vandalism and oil sabotage are critical to the discourse in this piece of art, and as such, aspects of their significance must be highlighted for full comprehension. First, oil pipelines transmit crude oil, natural gas, and industrial chemicals (Chibuzor, Chukwujekwu, & Ekene, 2014). Without a purposeful act of vandalism or sabotage, oil pipelines are critical and sensible infrastructure that might produce unthinkable disasters during operation, transit of petroleum products, or maintenance. According to Chibuzor et al. (2014), vandalism is an unlawful or unauthorised action carried out collaboratively with multiple entities in the destruction of gas, petroleum, and chemical pipelines. According to Umar and Othman (2017), vandalism is a conscious adversarial behavior of dissatisfied and corrupt persons directed directly against an environmental item with the destructive objective of ruining properties and inflicting damage. Furthermore, Christensen, Johnson, and Brookes (1992) define oil vandalism as a "productive force that battled against the discovery of a capacity system" throughout the globe. Even though different people or nations may hold opposing views on the concept of vandalism and what 'acts' constitute vandalism, the concept could be applied to a variety of scenarios such as play vandalism, which includes breaking of window panels, cars, and other people's facilities, tactical vandalism, which includes sabotage at the workplace or organizational facilities (Umar & Othman, 2017), and vandalism as a source of revenge, where individuals feel cheated (vindicti (Umar & Othman, 2017). In addition, Aishatu, Chukwudi, and Hauwa'u (2016) define civil vandalism as the intentional damage of public or government property with criminal or political aim. While vandalism in the oil and gas industry refers to the breaking of oil pipelines in order to scoop petroleum product for personal or group consumption.

However, vandalism in most developing nations is intended to damage the government and/or oil and gas operating firms when they are seen to be ignored (Aishatu et al. 2016). The notion of product sabotage, workplace sabotage, government and even commercial facility sabotage is becoming more important owing to the implications of the act. Thus, sabotage is defined as "damaging, disrupting, or subverting the operations of the organization from the personal purpose of the saboteur (sabotage) by creating unfavorable publicity, embarrassment, delays in production, damage to property, destruction of working relationships, or the harming of employees or customers" (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002). Oil (pipeline) or sabotage is illegal in a developing nation such as Nigeria, according to Section 1 of the Petroleum Production and Distribution Act (Act 355 of 1990). However, the Act defines a saboteur as "any person who acts; assists another person; or incites, counsels, or procures any other person to do anything with purpose to disrupt or prevent the production or distribution of petroleum products in any part of Nigeria." Or, any person who wilfully does anything with the intent to obstruct or prevent the procurement of petroleum products for distribution in any part of Nigeria, or wilfully does anything in respect of any vehicle or any public highway with the intent to obstruct or prevent the use of that vehicle or that public highway for the distribution of petroleum products," the person found guilty of sabotage will be sentenced to death or 21 years' imprisonment (Onuoha, 2008).

The illegal demolition of pipelines to interrupt the flow of petroleum products for self-purpose and/or particular group intent for black-market sales in any dimension is forbidden under Nigerian law. As a result, any individual or corporation engaging in such operations is regarded to be guilty of economic sabotage (Onuoha, 2008). The issue is, have the present legislation had a good impact on the desired goal? Despite the current rules and institutions responsible for monitoring and regulating the environmental performance of operational firms in Nigeria, occurrences of oil contamination due to sabotage are increasing on a daily basis (Shell, 2017). As a result, researchers and authors have repeatedly emphasized its worldwide negative influence (nation's

reputation), socioeconomic implications, and environmental effects (Albert, Amaratunga & Haigh, 2018; Elum, Mopipi, & Henri-Ukoha, 2016; Ndimele et al., 2018). However, the environment remains a tangible and aggregate of all external aspects that impact both living and non-living entities, drawing attention to any negative consequences (Olujobi, Oyewunmi, & Oyewunmi, 2018). The effects of sabotage and vandalism activities affect, but are not limited to, the soil, which is used for daily agricultural purposes in a country like Nigeria, the air, water as a significant source of living for both animals, plants, fish production, and human existence (Mogaji, Sotolu, Wilfred-Ekprikpo, & Green, 2018; Ndeh, Okafor, Akpan, & Olutoye, 2017; Olujobi According to Chibuzor et al. (2014), 40 percent of the world's oil runs via pipelines that span hundreds or millions of kilometers through dangerous terrain. As a result, it influences access to facilities and the severity of losses (Aishatu et al., 2016). Vandalism and sabotage have had a significant and ongoing influence on the Nigerian environment and other subsystems through the local refining process (oil bunkering) and its associated waves.

3.2 Oil Bunkering and Illegal oil bunkering

The term "bunker" is derived from a Scottish word that meaning "reserved seat" and is frequently used in a separate industry to indicate a location that secures or stores supplies like as ammunition, gasoline, diesel, or lubricant oil. Thus, in the context of this paper, which focuses on oil and gas petroleum products and environmental effluence, linking to shipping companies or oil and gas industries, a fuel bunker is defined as a means of storing fuel products on a ship and used for machinery operation, while bunkering refers to the process of dealing with bunker fuel, such as the process of fueling the ship with fuel or lube oil product. Thus, bunkering is the legal procedure by which a fully licensed operator delivers fuel, water, and lubricants for maritime services or requests (Mogaji et al., 2018; Onuzuruike, 2008). As a result, even if there is a misunderstanding of the term used to characterize oil theft, notably in Nigeria, making oil bunkering grasp a positive meaning in an overall logic. According to Vre (2012), oil bunkering is misunderstood in Nigeria owing to political, economic, and social difficulties entwined with criminal

behaviors. Notably, the activity of oil bunkering, which is the process of transferring a loaded ship with fuel/oil from one coast to another, is distinct from the process of vandalizing bunkering equipment. Thus, oil bunkering becomes criminal when unauthorized individuals, groups, or organizations scoop/vandalise petroleum products such as diesel, fuel, and so on for personal benefit.

As a result, Onuoha (2008) revealed in the Nigerian context that 'bunkering' is an ironic term used to characterize oil theft. However, oil bunkering and oil theft have become the most profitable private businesses in the Nigerian petroleum sectors in recent years, despite the fact that the activities began in the early 1980s (Igbinovia, 2014). Illegal oil bunkering, or the act of drilling oil pipelines to scoop petroleum product for personal benefit, is a widely practiced conduct carried out by illegal gangs motivated by a desire to steal oil product while indirectly sabotaging the oil and gas businesses or the government (Aishatu et al., 2016). Notably, illicit oil bunkering activity has been linked to various revenue losses for both the oil and gas sectors and the government since its peak in the early 2000s (Igbinovia, 2014; Onuoha, 2008; Shell, 2017).

Nonetheless, Vre (2012); Adishi and Hunga (2017) classify bunker activities into three major levels: small-scale operations that thrive at the local community level, where the petroleum product is condensed for domestic use and further tapped off for distributions in locally usable form; and large-scale operations that thrive at the national level. The second practice is when the crude oil product is meant for commercial delivery to barges and ocean-going tankers for further international distribution and destinations (Boris, 2015), and the third practice is where operating and/or delivery businesses exceed their lawful allotment (Adishi & Hunga, 2017). According to Onuoha (2008) and Vre (2012), well-organized operations of oil bunkers conducted by organizations are irreversible. Adishi and Hunga (2017) argue that "there is a big scale of illicit international trafficking on crude oil, which is increasingly sophisticated with the use of new technology to tap crude oil and travel through the labyrinth of hundreds of creeks, rivers, and streams." This technique has also progressed from simple boats

and barges to ships and tankers on the high seas, and it has grown widespread and widespread since the late 1990s." In reaction to Onuoha (2008) and Adishi and Hunga (2017), Vre (2012) emphasizes that corruption surrounding oil bunkering operations extends deeply into local community, government fabric, and the oil and gas business, threatening citizens' security actions. Thus, these unlawful operations have already reached industrial proportions, including international merchants and/or criminals, commodities dealers, and a diverse network of persons both inside and beyond Nigeria's borders (Adishi & Hunga, 2017; Olateju, 2013).

Chibuzor et al. (2014) advocate for extreme action by non-corrupt governmental regulatory authorities and international oil corporations (IOCs) to offer a preventative mechanism for future instances of the crime, considering that there were 497 vandalism incidents for oil bunkering reasons in 1999 alone (Okoli & Orinya, 2013). Furthermore, the Nigerian National Petroleum Commission recorded 2,787 pipeline breaches between 2010 and 2012. (NNPC). As a consequence, the country suffered a loss of around 12.53 billion Naira as a result of these incidences. Similarly, in 2008, an estimated 250,000 barrels of oil were lost every day owing to 'theft' operations, resulting in a \$22.5 million US dollar loss (Vre, 2012). Furthermore, the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) claimed a loss of 10.9 billion US dollars due to oil theft between 2009 and 2011. (Aishatu et al., 2016). Furthermore, according to Vre (2012), there was a decrease in vandalism and sabotage/thief operations in 2012, with an estimated loss of 3 million barrels per month compared to previous years. Despite its brief duration, the decline was recognized and attributed to a specific government security task force deployed against illicit oil bunkering operations (Vre, 2012). Similarly, Aishatu et al. (2016); Adishi and Hunga (2017) state that the activities of oil pipeline vandals for international and/or local refining (oil bunkering) resulted in a massive cost of over 174.57 billion Naira in product losses and pipeline repairs over ten years, as it became increasingly popular and practiced within Nigeria. Thus, a total of 16, 083 pipeline breaches were documented in 10 years, with 398 pipeline fractures representing 2.4 percent being due to rupture

and 15,685 breaks representing about 97.5 percent being the acts of unpatriotic vandals (Okoli & Orinya, 2013). However, the expansion of this dangerous activity, as well as the struggle for access to oil and gas profits, are thought to support a climate favourable to the emergence of an illegal conflict economy that works widely in this region of the nation (Vre, 2012). Furthermore, actions have fueled the lengthy insurgency and expanded armed conflict organizations, which provide cash for militant groups' operations.

According to Igbinoia (2014), Nigerian illicit oil bunkering has exacerbated global energy market volatility and posed a danger not just to Nigerian states but also to worldwide and oil-bearing communities. As a result, the losses in both production output and financial loss have not been without fatality occurrences among the process players, environmental implications, and human consequences (Aishatu, Chukwudi, & Hauwa'u; Okoli & Orinya, 2013).

Vandalized petroleum pipelines have been known to cause oil leaks and spills, contaminating land and water resources, accumulating in animals and plants, forcing people off of formerly productive land resources, causing ecological instability, and ultimately killing plants, animals, and humans (Imevbore and Odu 1985; Isichei and Ero 1987; Ikporukpo 1988; Egharevba and Osunde 2001; Jike 2004; Asumi 2009; Wunder 2005; Incardona et al 2010). In several situations, oil leaks have caused fires, killing many people and destroying their livelihoods. Between October 1998 and December 2007, at least 15 incidences of petroleum-pipeline-related fire catastrophes were reported in Nigeria (Fadeyibi et al. 2011; Okoli et al. 2013). The worst fire tragedy in Niger Delta history occurred in Jesse in October 1998, killing at least 1,200 people. Approximately nine similar fire disasters (in the years 2000, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007) have also happened in rural portions of Lagos State, with varying numbers of casualties. Between 2005 and 2006, the Amuwo-Odofin local government area (LGA) in Lagos State saw four pipeline fire disasters, each with a number of victims. Despite differing perspectives on the origins and consequences of pipeline explosion fires on persons, their livelihoods, and the environment, evidence on the ecological repercussions and the perceptions of victims of such sad occurrences is scarce. The lack of

understanding of causes and effects stems from the fact that the majority of resources accessible are from newspapers, which are often biased (e.g. White 2006; Adeniyi 2007). Many additional studies have likewise focused on laboratory analyses or literature reviews, which may not always reflect real-life experience in the field or the opinions of victims or witnesses of such events (e.g. Imevbore and Odu 1985; Egharevba and Osunde 2001; Jike 2004; Asumi 2009; Anifowose et al. 2011; Fadeyibi et al. 2011).

These bunkering activities had even lead to lost of life as experience recent **explosion and fire on a pipeline in Lagos, Nigeria killed five people and injured dozens on January 19, 2022. According to authorities, the blaze broke out after oil thieves ruptured the pipeline when trying to steal oil.** The NNPC said it is continuing to work with security agencies to prevent these incidents from occurring. Pipeline vandalism has plagued the Nigerian oil industry for many years. A report published by the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) in December 2019 revealed that crude oil and refined products worth \$41.9 billion were stolen in Nigeria between 2009 and 2020. Also At least 110 people have died in an explosion at an illegal oil refinery in Imo State Nigeria, emergency officials say. The disaster highlights the country's problems with oil theft amid high levels of poverty.

The blast occurred late on Friday at the facility, which lies between the southern [Nigerian](#) oil states of Rivers and Imo, police confirmed.

What do we know about the casualties?

Ifeanyi Nnaji of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) told AFP news agency that the death toll had risen from 80 as dozens of people "succumbed to their injuries."

Ifeanyi who heads NEMA operations in the area, said scores of people "with severe burns are still in the hospitals."

A mass burial is being planned for those killed in the explosion, many of who "were burnt beyond recognition," said Declan Emelumba, the Imo State Commissioner for Information.

What caused the blast?

Although the reason for the blast is unknown, it might have occurred during the process of refining crude oil, which involves boiling it by means of fire.

Idris Musa, director general of Nigeria's National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency said the dead included those engaged in illegal oil refining and bunkering.

Musa said an investigation into the disaster was underway.

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari described the incident as a "catastrophe and a national disaster."

Result and Discussions

Vandals, sabotage, and oil theft have severely harmed the environment, local economies, and socio-cultural dimensions of people in Nigerian communities. As a result, the issue was to identify the primary and possibly fundamental and influential factors of the recent surge in sabotage, oil theft, and vandalism. Thus, empirical evidence from the transcription of interviews conducted with community members and key environmental experts shows that abject poverty and lack of employment; shallow pipeline laying and insecurity; a sense of marginalization and neglect; corruption and bad governance are some infusing and influencing factors across communities. As a consequence, the following section shows preliminary findings along with quotes from respondents.

4.1 Corruption, poor and ineffective government

The level of corruption in the oil and gas distribution sectors, government sectors, and security organizations is disturbing, making it impossible to prevent oil sabotage and the destruction of oil installations. When this issue was examined with the oil spill-related agency, it was reiterated that "while corruption exists in the oil and gas industry, as it does everywhere, poor institutional frameworks contribute to corrupt activity." Corruption exists everywhere, depending on how it is defined, presented, and controlled (participants in oil spill agencies)." As a result, the majority of respondents believe that the basis of the government is flawed owing to various impunity (culture of criminal impunity), which would have an impact on every other sector. Communities reacting to corrupt activities and poor governance, on the other side, referred to the act as "Governance terrorism." The

reasons given were that the Nigerian government, both previous and current, had done things particularly for their benefit, thereby not positively contributing to oil and gas producing towns. Furthermore, several respondents indicated that "most corrupt security officers are heavily engaged in the sabotage, vandalism, and oil theft industry, making it much more difficult for curtailment (communities respondents)." In general, the majority of community members agreed that sabotage/vandalism will become more prevalent as communities get more involved in local oil bunkering within their local capacity. This viewpoint contradicts the findings of Vre (2012), who discovered that Nigerian security functions either independently or in collaboration with private contractors in order to fight criminal operations under various agreements between oil multinationals and private security contractors. According to Adishi and Hunga (2017), there has been claimed participation of the security force in criminal companies, making it harder to curb operations. This finding is consistent with the findings of Umar and Othman (2017) and Albert, Amaratunga, and Haigh (2018), who discovered that legal factors influence vandalism, and that weak institutions and inadequate compensation to victims of oil spills can encourage crime, vandalism, oil theft, or sabotage. This research also supports Umar and Othman (2017)'s confirmatory analysis of correlations between multiple structures and vandalism, in which they discovered that inadequate governance contributes significantly to crude oil pipeline vandalism in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

4.2 Deplorable poverty and unemployment

The prevalence of poverty and unemployment among Nigerian youngsters is frightening. As a result, while considering vandalism and oil sabotage in relation to environmental damage. Given that some of the perpetrators of such actions are jobless youngsters, the majority of participants ascribed the reasons to poverty and unemployment. According to participants, the poverty level in these communities is harmful, and the fact that some neighborhood homes struggle to buy one square meal per day is "worth" doing everything for survival. Participants emphasized, "Now that the problem of oil bunkering exists, most communities were never into such industry, but when you realized that, it is an alternative livelihood support, you prefer to engage to survive (Community Respondents)."

4.3 Pipeline insecurity and shallow laying

According to the oil-related agency, most of the pipes are above ground and so attract criminal motivation, even if vandals from the communities take out the actions in collaboration with other higher authorities and international entities. Members of the community have developed a feeling of neglect and marginalization, and as a result, they will exploit every chance to damage government and or multinational facilities, even when certain basic supplies are periodically given. In contrast, a majority of oil and gas players dispute the idea of shallow pipeline constructions, claiming that community sabotage and vandalism are purposeful acts. As a result, respondents from the oil and gas industries believe that pipelines should be buried below, above, or under the sea and, as such, should not provide a pathway for vandals. On the other hand, the majority of community members believe that oil bunkering will continue to grow since it helps communities with their livelihoods. Participants feel that shallow pipeline laying is not a factor that encourages sabotage, however community and agency responses reported that shallow laying of certain pipelines over and within communities without optimum protection influences vandalism/sabotage. The community perspective, on the other hand, supports the literature of (Akinleye, 2018), who revealed that most communities have felt marginalised and neglected for decades, and as such, oil bunkering becomes a 'share' for the communities, regardless of any form of treatment to health and the environment.

4.4 A Feeling of Marginalization and Neglect

In South-South Nigeria, marginalisation and neglect are brutally and glamorously accentuated and emphasized. The bitterness and glamour of neglect and marginalisation stem from the fact that 90 percent of the revenue derived from the region and yet received little or nothing in comparison to the living standard, other than environmental damages and pollution of various kinds from the exploration and production of the petroleum product. According to the participants, the two conceptions (marginalization and neglect) are planned acts by the Nigerian government and oil and gas corporations. A majority of the interviewees emphasized that "the act of neglect" was important.

In order to derive significance from the data, the researcher systematically picked graduate respondents and cross-checked their responses to the unemployment concerns. It was clear that practically all of the graduate participants were involved in oil bunkering firms, confirming that there were no job possibilities, therefore oil bunkering became an alternative. According to the majority of respondents, "employment comes with whom you know and not because your community generates petroleum product, employment in this region of the globe is not by merit, talents, and potentials, but most likely godfatherism (Community Respondents)." On the contrary, the majority of oil and gas industry specialists disagree with the notion that "poor and unemployment" were the core reasons of sabotage and vandalism. Thus, most vandals/actors are rich and educated individuals, and the crimes are taken out on purpose to disrupt oil companies and the government, rather than as acts of poverty. "Communities are never satisfied with any provision offered by the oil multinationals and as such, will want to blame the oil operating companies and the government by indulging in the act of vandalism (oil and gas respondents)," the oil and gas participants added. "Vandalism, oil theft, or bunkering will never stop until the Nigerian Government takes appropriate steps to compensate the natives or communities across the region (community respondents)." According to participants, the occurrences will continue as long as the region's people feel marginalized and mistreated. Similarly, when the communities or natives of the area experience a feeling of belonging as a result of the Nigerian government's action or oil collaboration, oil sabotage, oil terrorism, and vandalism would halt, which has not happened in recent times. This finding is consistent with the findings of Umar and Othman (2017), Adishi and Hunga (2017), and Boris (2015), who state that denial and exclusion from societal and or natural resource utilization by primary owners may influence the formation of groups among aggrieved individuals, increasing the frequency of stress and emotional outburst. Additionally, the operations of oil bunkering and theft are expanding.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the study's results, the researcher finds that, from an institutional standpoint, corruption, weak and inadequate governance are important factors affecting

sabotage, vandalism, and oil theft. While extreme poverty and unemployment are elements driving sabotage, vandalism, oil bunkering, and oil theft, neglect and a feeling of marginalisation are also issues. Despite the fact that the majority of community members justified the act by implying that it was an alternative means of livelihood support due to damage to original livelihood structures, the study concludes that easy access to pipelines is a major factor influencing sabotage, vandalism, and oil theft. As a result, considering that most pipelines are laid crisscrossed across and inside neighborhood topography, increased community engagement in pipeline security is required.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following critical strategies to reduce the act of sabotage, vandalism, oil bunkering, and oil theft. Such recommendations are;

To provide profound security initiatives which include 24 hour monitoring devices entrusted in community security agents in collaboration with the oil and gas and oil spill-related agencies concerned.

Establish a profound inclusion mechanism for oil producing communities in security plans.

A good governance and fair distribution of oil wealth and political prioritisation across communities of the region in such a way that includes the natives of oil-bearing communities.

Likewise, a good philosophy where a worthy and appropriate infrastructural development are put in place to enhance societal needs, irrespective of the present situations.

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