

**Exploring the Relationships between Environmental  
Governance, Social Inequality and the Politics of  
Exclusion: Evidence from the Niger Delta, Nigeria**

**By**

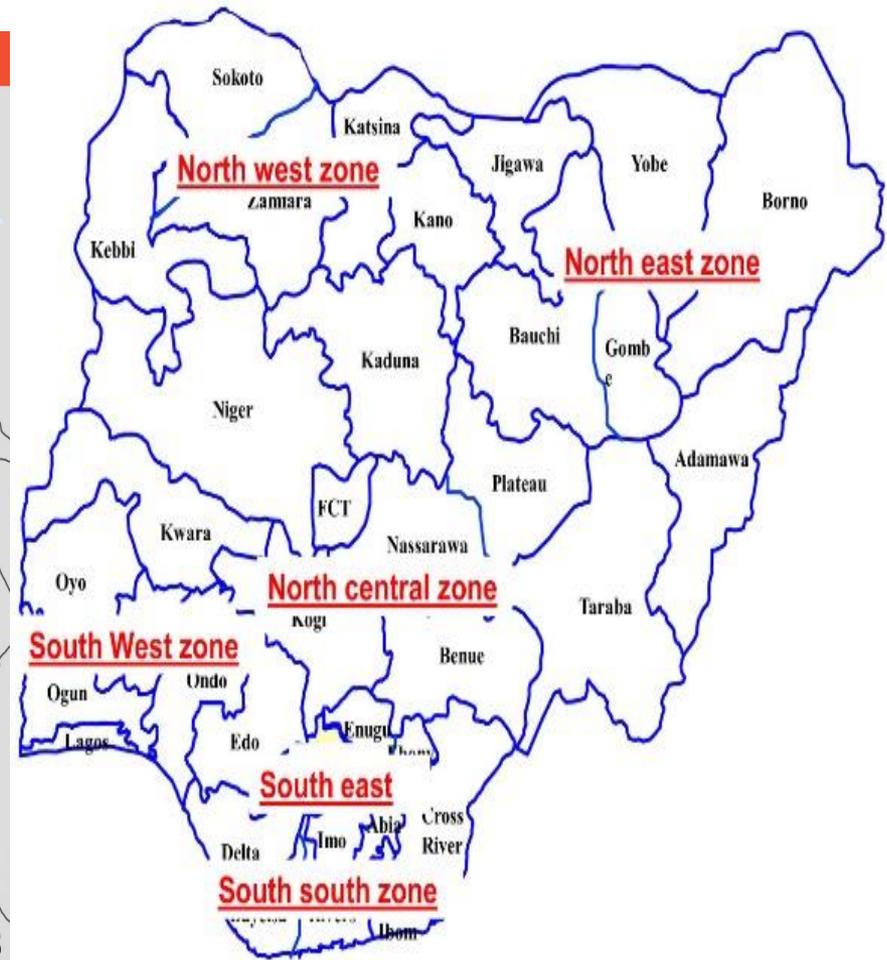
**Iwebunor Okwechime, PhD**

**Department of International Relations,**

**Obafemi Awolowo University,**

**Nigeria.**

# The nine states that constitute the Niger Delta and six zones that make up the Nigerian Federation.



# Introduction and Overview

The paper seeks to examine how the crisis of environmental governance has deepened social inequality and intensified the politics of exclusion/marginalization of the oil minorities of the Niger Delta region.

## **The crisis of environmental governance in the Niger Delta: origins, nature, dimensions and consequences**

- Environmental concerns were barely on the radar screen of successive federal administrations, despite the advent of oil and gas production in 1956.
- The environment is contested terrain: people depend it for their livelihood and for social needs (e.g. housing); it has religious, spiritual and cultural utility to the people; and it also has a global significance in terms of oil and gas resources.
- There is an acute shortage of land in the ND, with a land area of 7500 square kilometres and a total population of 40 million (NBS, 2015)

\*The onset of the national economic crisis and structural adjustment in the mid-1980s highlighted the seriousness of the environmental crisis (Saro-Wiwa, 1996; Obi, 1999; Turner, 2001).

\*Three events further underscored the urgency of the problem:

- 1) the dumping of toxic waste in Koko, Delta State, in 1988, by an Italian firm through a Nigerian-based company acting as its agent

- 2) the globalization of environmental issues by the 1987 Brundtland Report and

- 3) the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)

\* The Koko incident led to the establishment of the defunct Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA).

\* Before the Koko incident, major oil spills had occurred in Ogoni (Rivers State), Akwa Ibom, Delta and Bayelsa States, among others.

\*Nearly two decades after the establishment of the National Environmental Standards and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA), FEPA's successor, and 7 years after the UNEP Report, the Ogoni clean-up has yet to be undertaken.

\*There is a huge problem with the entire environmental governance set-up in Nigeria. NESREA does not regulate the oil and gas sector; the Directorate of Petroleum Resources (DPR), which deals with the issues, often depend on the offending oil company's equipment and facilities in its monitoring exercises (Bassey, 2012)

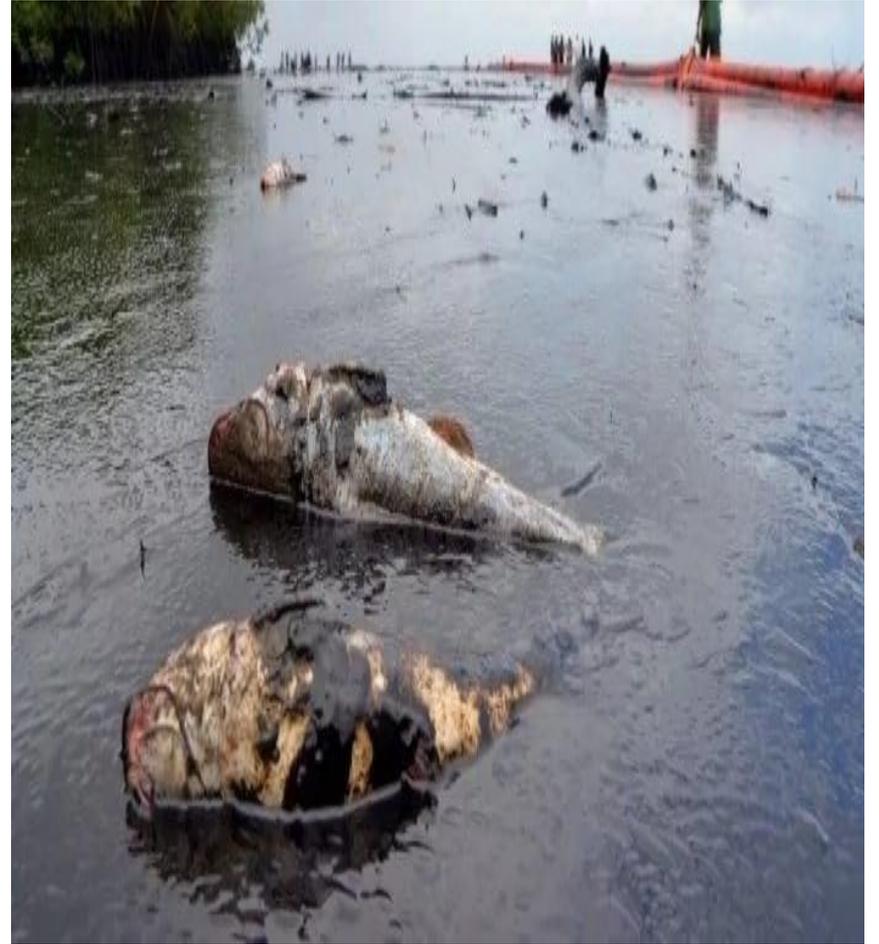
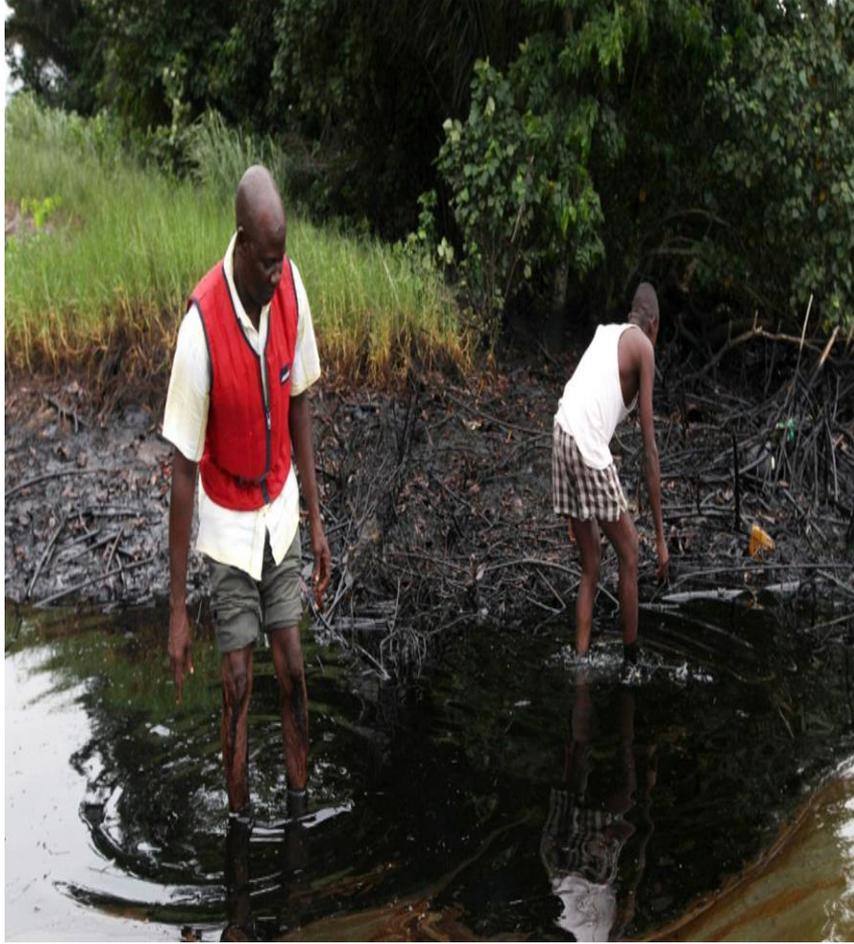
\*It can be deduced from the foregoing that:

1) There is a contradiction of environmental governance agendas between the oil-producing communities and the state/oil companies.

2) To the oil communities, environmental governance means no more than the management and protection of their environment and resources in ways that ensure sustainable development in the region.

3) To the Nigerian state/oil companies, it means the exploitation of the region's environmental resources in ways that ensure the maximization of profits.

\* This implies using the tools of economic development- free trade, private sector initiatives, and other economic incentives- for environmental protection, a process which is related more to 'sustained' development than true protection of natural resources (O'Neil, 2011).



## **Liberal reformism, social inequality and the politics of exclusion in the Niger Delta**

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), in its form and content, falls within the rubric of economic globalization (Okwechime, 2011)

- . SAP was adopted against the backdrop of worsening debt crisis in Nigeria.
- . SAP resulted in the intensification of oil exploration and the further integration of the region into the market-driven global capitalist system.

### **Consequences :**

- increased environmental degradation and widespread social disorder
- land dispossession (for oil industry-related activities)
- heightened environmental pollution (of land, water and air)
- widespread disempowerment arising from loss of traditional occupations

.The market allocates resources to the few capitalist powerful players at the expense of the majority of people who are weak and vulnerable (Obi, 1999, Obi, 2010)

.The politics of exclusion is a product of several factors inherent in the character of the postcolonial state in Nigeria:

- the ‘geography’ of oil
- land ownership and control of resources
- fiscal federalism
- Elite corruption (at local, state and national levels)

. At the heart of the politics of exclusion is dispossession and the denial of power over oil to certain social groups in the region.

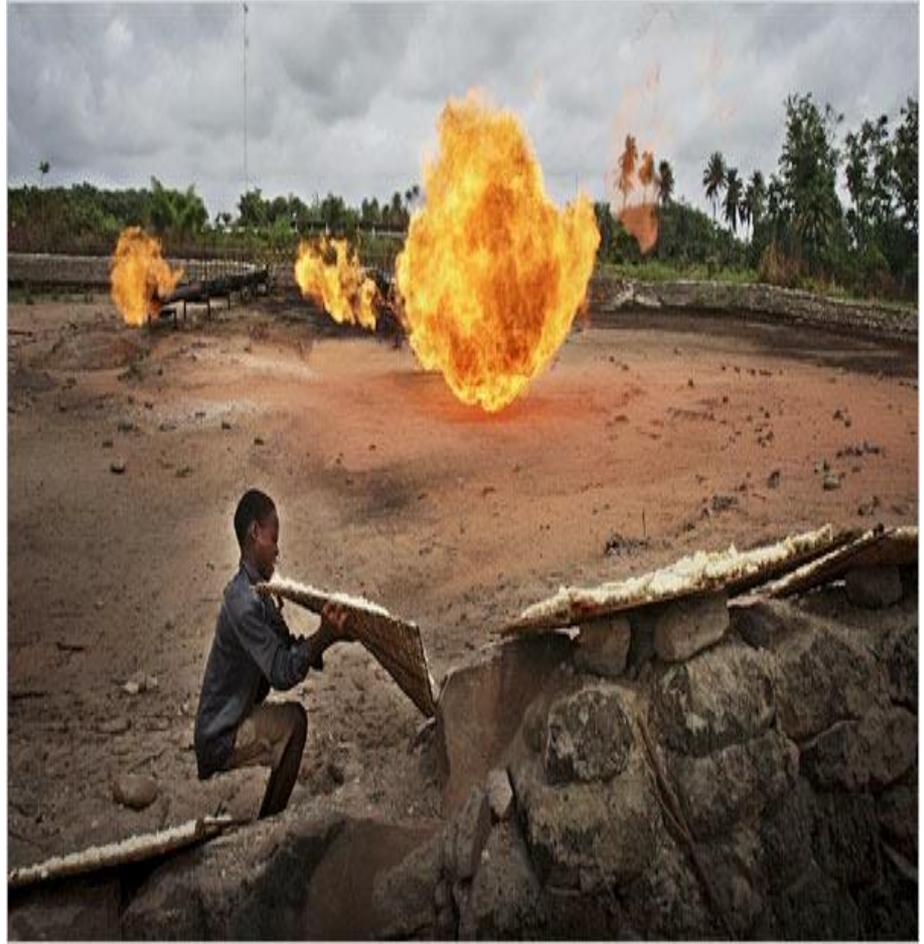
. It is within this context that the citizenship question in the Niger Delta should be located.

. Its manifestations are visible in terms of:

- the upsurge in environmental activism (e.g. Ogoni)
- youth militancy
- oil theft and pipeline vandalism







# **Conclusion:**

## **Beyond social inequality and the politics of exclusion**

The Niger Delta is the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg for the Nigerian state. The Nigerian state must begin to think 'out of the barrel', if it must continue to rely on oil as the life blood of its economy.

- . Government at various levels in the region should ensure policies that promote social equality
- . They, as well as the oil companies, must be responsive to just and legitimate demands of the people in whose communities they operate
- . Youths should be empowered through provision of functional educational and skills acquisition facilities, as well as gainful employment for qualified youths.
- . Environmental remediation should be prioritized by the Nigerian state and oil companies. The Ogoni clean-up must be given urgent attention.
- . Farmers or families whose farms or economic trees are blighted by spills should be adequately compensated.
- . Government should desist from palliative measures such as amnesty programmes which can only perpetuate social inequality and exclusion in the oil-producing communities.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION**