

**OIL INDUCED ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND INTERNAL
POPULATION DISPLACEMENT IN THE NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA**

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Abstract

Internal displacement has become an issue of topical concern, due to the human tragedy and insecurity associated with it. The theme that dominates discussions on IDP's at global and national levels is conflict-induced displacements. The objective of this paper is to bring into focus, the linkages between oil based environmental degradation and displacements in the Niger Delta. The framework of analysis sees displacement as a definite social condition that diminishes individuals and group capacity to pursue interests that may or may not involve relocation. The study concludes that oil related environmental problems – oil spillages, gas flaring, among others, have diminished the productivity of Oil Producing Communities, resulting to occupational and income losses that set in both voluntary and involuntary migration. Again, for this reason, some individuals live as aliens in their own communities, where they are unable to actualize their interest or aspirations. The paper draws attention to the urgent need to resolve environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta.

Introduction

Environmental degradation issues are of topical concern to communities in the Niger Delta (NDES Briefing Note, October 1995:2), as it is a major cause of productivity losses (World Bank, 1995:117). The dominant view blames oil production and its attendant consequences for the declining productivity of local economies that are mainly based on fisheries and agriculture (Aaron, 2006, Salau, 1993, Okoko, 1998, Ibeanu, 2002). Although the World Bank (1995) disagrees with this and holds population increase, the construction of upstream dams, among other factors as more significant

causes of productivity declines, Lean (cited in Ibaba, 2003:36) insists that oil production has worsened environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

But, what is the impact of productivity losses on the people? The literature on the Niger Delta highlights poverty, unemployment, underemployment, proletarianisation, and rural – urban migration as the consequences. However, the literature appears not to have adequately addressed the potentials of internal population displacement arising from oil based environmental degradation, and the resultant productivity losses in the Niger Delta. The study seeks to fill this gap. We argue that environmental degradation, caused by the Oil industry does not only have the potentials of exacerbating the tragedy of internal displacements in the Niger Delta, but is responsible for many of the dislocations experienced in the area. The collapse of local economies, induced by oil spillages, gas flaring, and other activities of the oil industry had displaced many from their occupations, without providing viable alternatives. We argue that the pressures of survival do encourage forced migration or induce voluntary movement that manifests as rural – urban or rural – rural migration in the area.

Internal displacement has become one of the human tragedies confronting the world today. In Nigeria, government has recognized it as a problem. Internal displacement in Nigeria is largely blamed on flood, erosion and conflicts. However, conflict – induced displacements appear to be more, and are therefore given prominence. In this regard, the Niger Delta region is highlighted, as an area where oil – induced conflicts have displaced thousands of people. The interconnectedness of other factors with displacement is either ignored or treated as tangential. The paper thus intends to investigate the linkage between oil based environmental degradation and internal population displacement in the Niger Delta area.

The Concept of Internally Displaced Person's (IDP's)

The description of Internally Displaced Persons hinges on forced or obliged migration within national boundaries. The United Nations Guiding Principles On IDP's (cited in Zard, 2002) defines IDP's as:

...persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human – made disasters, and who have not crossed an internally recognized State border.

A central element in the description of IDP's is involuntary migration. This would mean that voluntary migration is not captured in the definition. It is proper to argue how ever that voluntary migration in search of means of livelihood or economic survival due to occupation displacement/losses can also qualify as internal displacement.

A crucial factor in such migration is poverty, and as noted by Zard (2002), the exclusion of people who are displaced by extreme poverty in the definition of IDP's makes it narrow. Toure (2006:11) has also noted in this regard that internally displaced persons may also be victims of structural causes such as poverty.

The description of IDP's emphasizes relocation as an important criterion. To be sure, there could be displacement without relocation, as displacement could also be defined as the inability of a social group or community to achieve its interests, particularly, basic and recurrent needs in relation to other groups (Ibeanu, nd,:3). Thus, occupational displacements and the resultant loss of means of livelihood and income, that inhibits the competitive advantage of one group in relation to another, are a manifestation

of displacement. Given this, voluntary and involuntary movement no matter the conceptualization, cannot be an adequate determinant of internal displacement unless they are broadened to include other variables.

Our premise as stated before is based on the argument that oil based environmental degradation has exacerbated poverty in the Niger Delta, and as such, has induced migration within the rural area and between the rural and urban areas. Environmental degradation and its attendant effects appear unnoticed to most observers, probably because many of the displaced persons live with host families or communities, and in some cases among squatters in the urban areas. However, the literature on IDP's places emphasis on conflict induced displacements, probably because it is dominant. The failure to appreciate structural causes (poverty, unemployment, occupational losses, etc) of internal population displacement robs us of the opportunity to appreciate the phenomenon fully.

The population of internally displaced persons in the world is put at 25 million in 2001 (Refugee rights, 8/18/2006) with the top ten countries cited as Sudan 4.5 million; Colombia 2.45 million; Angola 2 to 3 million; Congo – Kinshasha 2 million; Indonesia 1.4 million; Afghanistan 1 million; Burma 60,000 to 1 million, Turkey 400,000 to 1 million, Sri Lanka 800,000; and Iraq 700,000 (Zard, 2002). Although, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) disagrees with the IDP figures, the situation still illuminates a hidden crisis, going by the UNHCR figures. **

By 2005, statistics of the Global IDP project showed that the internally displaced persons numbered 23.7 million, and affected 50 countries. 20 of these were in Africa with 12.1 million IDP's (Sohne, 2006:4). The most affected countries, according to the statistics, are Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Uganda. Together, these

countries account for 9 million IDP's in Africa (Thisday, June 27, 2006). In Nigeria, the number of IDP's, range between 200,000 and 800,000. Whereas, the 2005 report of the Norwegian Refugee Council put the figure at 200,000, the Nigerian National Studies on IDPs in Nigeria tend to focus on conflict induced cases. This includes the Niger Delta, our area of interest. The table below shows some of the pattern of violence that erupts in Nigeria and the resultant displacement.

Table 1
Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria:
Population Figures and Profile

Location	Causes of Displacement	Year of occurrence	Number displaced
Plateau State	Ethnic violence	2004	298,000
Adamawa/ Gombe State	Ethnic violence	2003	20,000
Plateau State	Ethnic violence	2001	50,000
Lagos State	Ethnic violence	2002	5,000
Kano State	Religious clashes	2001	8,000
Ebonyi State	Violent clashes	2001	1,000
Bauchi State	Ethno-religious violence	2001	22,000
Kaduna	Religious violence	2002	30,000
Kano	Religious violence	2004	10,000

Source: Norwegian Refugee Council, Profile of Internal Displacement in Nigeria, February 2005, online <http://www.idpproject.org> in Nigeria: a hidden crisis, February 2005, online www.idpproject.org.

Although the Niger Delta area does not accommodate the religious or the ethno-religious variants of violence, the 'hidden crisis' in the area has not escaped the attention of observers. For example, the Nigerian Internal Displacement Project (www.idpproject.org) captures the Niger Delta experience as follows:

Displacement has... been linked to oil production in the... Niger Delta. While environmental degradation and lack of benefits from oil revenues appear to have been a catalyst for many of the conflicts during the 1990's, more recently the transfer of money back to local communities has become a reason for violent clashes. One reason for this

paradox is that community development programmes funded by the Oil Companies have made political positions increasingly attractive. Furthermore, the demarcation of new administrative boundaries and the creation of new political constituency area have in many cases become the focus of violent dispute between communities... The violence triggered by these disputes has frequently forced people in the Oil Producing States to flee their homes. ...In September 2004, it was reported that at least 6,000 people had been displaced in several weeks of violence between local militia and security forces, as well as by infighting between militia.

In addition to intra and inter community conflicts, oil company conflicts and community/state conflicts have displaced thousands of people from their communities. In Bayelsa State for instance, the Ewoama community of about 8,000 persons have been displaced for 10 years, following the total destruction of the town by Okpoama community, over chieftaincy dispute. In Rivers State, thousands of Ogoni's were displaced for years due to State violence and repression over oil rights. In Delta State, the Ijaw-Itsekiri feud, which resulted from the relocation of the Warri South Local Government head quarters from Ogbe-Ijaw to Ogidigben, displaced thousands of people on both sides.

As noted elsewhere, conflict is generally accepted as a dominant cause of internal displacement. However, this does not mean that there are no other causes of internal displacement. . The crisis of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region, in our view, qualifies for a critical examination. The question is, what is the impact of oil based environmental degradation on internal population displacement in the Niger Delta?

Environmental Degradation and Internal Population Displacement: Reflections on the Niger Delta Experience

Development literature clearly shows that the environment is the basis for the sustenance and survival of man (Emeribe, 2000:209, Olagbaiye, 1990:1). 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. (National Report for the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development)

Paradoxically, man's appetite and quest for development in some cases, tend to upset the quality of the environment which do results to losses in productivity and income that necessitates migration in extreme cases. In the Niger Delta, the environment is confronted with environmental problems that are categorized into oil and non-oil sectors. The non-oil related environmental problems include, coastal/river bank erosion, flooding, spread of exotic species, agricultural land degradation, fisheries depletion, and inadequate sanitary and waste management. (<http://www.shellnigeria.com/ecology/nonoilprobs.rhs.a.sp>).

The oil related environmental problems are oil spills, gas flaring, dredging of canals and land take for the construction of facilities. (<http://www.shellnigeria.com/ecology/oilprobs.rhs.asp>). The oil related environmental problems are recognized as man made and given prominence by the Niger Delta people, who experience a direct relationship between oil production and productivity losses. The multinational oil companies on the other hand dispute this and blame other factors, poverty and population growth for instance, as the major causes of environmental degradation in the region. The World Bank (1995) supports this by noting that:

Oil pollution, contrary to common perception, is only of moderate priority when compared with the full spectrum of environmental problems in the Niger Delta...many residents assign a direct cause and effect relationship between oil development and declines in fisheries and agricultural productivity... However...other factors such as population increases and migration, as well as the construction of upstream dams, are more significant causes of the productivity declines.

It is however undisputable that ever since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956, the Niger Delta environment has known no respite (Aaron, 2006:197). The major culprits are oil spills and gas flaring. As a result of equipment failure and sabotage, oil spills have become endemic and devastating in the Niger Delta.

In 2001, the Western Operations of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) recorded a total of 115 incidents of oil spills in which 5,187.14 barrels of oil were spilled. Of significance is the fact that only 734,53 barrels of the spilt oil, representing 14.2 percent were recovered (SPDC Western Operations, Environmental Department, August 2002).

Since 1989, the SPDC has recorded an average of 221 spills per year in its operations area, involving a total of 7,350 barrels annually (SPDC Nigeria Briefs, May 1995:3). Other oil multinationals also spill oil into the Niger Delta environment. For example, in January 1998, 40,000 barrels of light crude oil were spilled by Mobil in Eket (Da Costa, 1999).

Furthermore, oil spill statistics show that a total of 2,796 oil spill incidences were recorded between 1976 and 1990, leading to the spilling of 2,105,393 barrels of oil (Punch, February 20, 1991:2). Three million barrels of oil were lost to 6,817 oil spill incidents between 1976 and 2001; over 70 percent of the spilt oil was not recovered (UNDP, 2006:181). The World Bank (1995:49) has also noted that about 2,300m³ of oil

was spilt in 300 separate incidences in old Rivers (which include Bayelsa State) and Delta States. The table below captures a disturbing scenario of environmental devastation in the Niger Delta.

Table 2
Summary of Some Oil Spills in the Niger Delta: 1979 – 2005

Episode	Year	State	Quantity spilt in barrels
Forcados terminal oil spills	1979	Delta	570,000
Funiwa No.5 well blow out	1980	Rivers	400,000
Oyakama oil spillage	1980	Rivers	10,000
System 2c Warri – Kaduna Pipeline rupture at Abudu	1982	Edo	18,000
Sohika oil spill	1983	Rivers	10,000
Idoho oil spill	1983	Akwa-Ibom	40,000
Jones creek oil spill	1998	Delta	21,000
Jesse oil spill	1998	Delta	10,000
Etiama oil spill	2000	Bayelsa	11,000
Ughelli oil spill	2005	Delta	10,000

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Niger Delta Human Development Report, Abuja, Nigeria, 2006, P:184

The oil companies have continuously blamed many of the oil spills on sabotage. For example, although the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) reported 1,137 cases of sabotage, involving 17,644 barrels of spilt oil in 2000, (SPDC Annual Report, 2000:17) the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), the regulatory agency in Nigeria contends that about 88 percent of oil spill incidence is traceable to equipment failure (South – South Express, June 17, 2002).

Oil spills and gas flaring are not unconnected with the oil industry elsewhere in the world. The point, however, is that the oil multinationals operating in the region do not conform to international standard (Aaron, 2006:198). For example, the oil companies adopt the “Open pipe flare” method to flare gas in the area. This method is obsolete, and is not used by these same companies in the developed countries. The “Open pipe flare” method degrades the environment more than accepted types, such as the “ground open

flare” with Sand Banks. Amaseigmogha (in Environment Watch, 15th – 30th November, 1998:7) has noted that:

Most of the black smoke associated with... the open pipe type contains elements derived from the products of incomplete combustion, including soot and various sizes of carbon particles which are both hazardous. Other pollutants usually associated with smoky flares are unburned sulphur particles and oxides of sulphur (Sox) as well as nitrogenous oxides (Nox). With the use of standard flares, these obnoxious compounds and elements are burned and completely converted to form stable compounds that are no longer active or poisonous.

The twin evils of oil spills and gas flaring, in addition to seismographic and construction activities of the oil companies have undermined the local economies of Oil Producing Communities, leading to occupational disorientation and the exacerbation of poverty. The result of this is normally displacement of people. The table below captures the effects.

Table 3
Summary of Adverse Impacts of Petroleum Development

Phase (Process)	Adverse Impact
Pre-Drilling Activity (Aerial and Seismic survey)	<p>Noise – Noise from aircraft or helicopter access and plant delivery.</p> <p>Vibration – Vibration from trucks, vehicles and aircraft or helicopters; from vibroseis or shot hole method.</p> <p>Damage – Cracks may develop on walls of nearby buildings or dwelling houses from crack.</p> <p>Wildlife – Increased poacher access; Disturbance of wildlife; pollution of water sources.</p> <p>Communities – Disturbance of previously remote communities; pollution or loss of vital natural resources for medicinal and other purposes; introduction of hitherto unknown diseases.</p> <p>Culture – Damage to site of archaeological, historical or cultural importance.</p> <p>Infrastructure – Truck damage to dirt road and water course</p>

	<p>crossing points.</p> <p><u>Secondary Impacts</u> – Settlement logging or mining induced by new access.</p>
<p>Exploratory and Production Drilling</p>	<p><u>Soil</u> – Erosion due to construction activities; contamination with oil, drilling mud and effluent.</p> <p><u>Vegetation</u> – Loss of vegetation due to construction of access tracks and drill sites; Extensive vegetation loss due to fire; Facilitation of encroachment in forests.</p> <p><u>Water</u> – Contamination of surface and ground water with oil, drilling mud and effluents; Disruption of water courses or drainage.</p> <p><u>Landscape</u> – Visual intrusion of drilling rigs; Night lighting; Flaring of gas.</p> <p><u>Air</u> – Smoke from gas flare; offensive odor.</p> <p><u>Wildlife</u> – Increased poacher access; Disturbance of wildlife; Pollution of water sources.</p> <p><u>Communities</u> – Disturbance of previously remote communities; pollution or loss of vital natural resources for medicinal and other purposes; introduction of hitherto unknown diseases.</p> <p><u>Culture</u> – Damage to site of archaeological, historical or cultural importance.</p> <p><u>Infrastructure</u> – Settlement logging or mining induced by new access.</p>
<p>Decommissioning</p>	<p><u>Noise</u> – Noise from closure of roads and course ways constructed to facilitate drilling operations.</p> <p><u>Water</u> – Contamination of surface and ground water from the filling of mud incineration and waste pits.</p> <p><u>Navigation</u> – Offshore abandonment may obstruct navigation and pose a danger to fishing.</p>

Source: Worika, 2002:48

It is clear from the table that the oil industry impacts negatively on the economies of the Oil Producing Communities. Farming and fishing, the mainstay of the local economies are castrated. For example, total recovery for an oil spill impacted land takes as long as 10 to 15 years (Ekekwe, cited by World Bank, 1995:51, Akpofure, et al, 2000:49). This is made worse by delay in cleanup, due to insensitivity on the part of the operating company, bureaucratic bottlenecks or disagreement between communities and oil companies. These disagreements favor the multinational oil companies which losses nothing while the stand off lasts.

There are examples of spills that were not cleaned for months or years. In Epubu community, a spill that occurred in December 1998 was not cleaned until about a year (Clark, et al, 1999:7). Similarly, a spill that occurred at Aleibiri in March 1997 was not attended to for 6 months, until youths of the community staged a protest (Aaron, 2006:200). Also, a spill that occurred in October 1995 at Akenfa and Ogboloma communities was not cleaned until December of that same year (Ibaba, 2005:31). The cases are indeed numerous. The effect is the worsening of ecological devastation.

As shown on table 4, oil spills, destroy vegetation, mangrove forests, food/cash crops, fishing ground/marine life, reduces nutrient value of the soil, induces land fragmentation, and in isolated cases, sets communities on fire. A spill at Osima creek in Agbakabiriyai, near Nembe on February 28th 1998, led to eight days of fire, which razed down the entire community. This resulted to the destruction of about 400 houses, and the displacement of about 130,000 inhabitants (National Agenda, August 1995:12).

It is undisputable that oil spill impacted lands and waters do experience declining productivity in farming and fishing. The immediate effect is the destruction of crops and marine life in the long run; it reduces the nutrient value of the soil and makes the waters

inhabitable by fishes. It is discernible that farmers and fishermen, whose farmlands and fishing grounds are affected, have no alternative than to move to other areas as displaced persons; at least for a period. In the case of land, it encourages its fragmentation, as those affected moves on to the little farmlands that are left. The fragmentation that follows leads to over use of farmlands. For example, the bush fallow period of 3 – 5 years in such cases has to be reduced to 1 year, or abandoned, as result of oil spillages. This undermines the productivity of farmlands on which the inhabitants thrive.

Related to oil spills is gas flaring, which is as old as the oil industry in Nigeria. Nigeria flares about 75 percent of the gas it produces (UNDP, 2006:185); more than any other country in the world. (See table below.)

Table 4
Flaring of National Gas in Major Producing Countries (% of Gross Production in 1991)

Country	Percentage Flared
United States of America (USA)	0.6
Holland	0.0
Britain	4.3
Former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR)	1.5
Mexico	5.0
<i>OPEC Countries</i>	
Nigeria	76.0
Libya	21.0
Saudi Arabia	20.0
Algeria	19.0
OPEC Total	18.0
World Total	4.8

Source: World Bank Report, 1995, Vol.1:59

Available information indicates that a total of 5.0 trillion cubic feet of associated gas was flared in Nigeria, between 1958 and 1999. This represents 88 percent of the 5.7 trillion cubic feet that was produced within the period (Environment Watch, 16th – 31st October, 2001:5).

Gas flaring is associated with many of the devastating health ailments that afflict human beings. Apart from this, the heat it generates kills vegetation around the flare area, destroys mangrove swamps and salt marsh, suppresses the growth and flowering of some plants, induces soil degradation, and diminishes agricultural production (UNDP, 2006:186, Mba, 2000:223). The impact of gas flaring on agriculture is demonstrated by a study on the Izombe flow station in Imo State. The findings clearly show a close relationship between gas flaring and productivity declines in agriculture. The information is presented in table 5 below.

Table 5
The Impact of Gas Flaring on Agricultural Output

Distance of Farmland from Flare Site	Percentage Loss in Yield of Crops
200 metres	100 percent
600 metres	45 percent
1 kilometre	10 percent

Source: Salau, 1993:19-22, Adeyemo, 2002:69.

Also destructive to the environment is the seismographic use of dynamites. The boring of 3 – 6 meter holes for seismogelite explosive shots do contribute to the destruction of soil quality and habitable buildings. In addition, the use of these explosives has been found to be responsible for the extinction of certain species of animals. The result of which is the depletion in the quantity of game animals and the reduction of rewards that use to accrue to hunting (Aaron, 2006:198). Equally, aggravating is the continuous use of over aged and outdated pipelines which easily spill their contents into the environment. (Ikporukpo, cited by Ikein, 1990:43, Clark, et al, 1999:12).

We must also not lose sight of the increasing cases of land fragmentation with its resultant decline in agricultural productivity. This scenario is caused by land take for other activities, engaged by the oil industry. Statistics show that a lot of farmlands have

been lost to the oil industry by Oil Producing Communities. The case of Okrika is presented in the table below.

Table 6
Cultivable Land Lost To Oil Exploitation – Related Activities in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, 1991

No. of persons affected	Name of oil field	No. of wells	Land area (Ita) per well	Total land area (Ita) lost to oil wells	Total land area (sq.ha) for other shell activities around the well	Land area for Helicopter landing	Land area lost to flow station (sq.ha)	Total land area lost to oil exploitation activities
72	Bolo	10	6.3	6.3	1.2	1.4	6.3	71.9
66	Iwokiri	9	6.3	53.7	1.2	1.4	6.3	65.6
61	Mbikiri	8	6.3	50.4	2.4	1.4	6.3	60.5
221	Agokien	34	6.3	214.2	2.4	2.8	6.3	225.7
81	Ele	11	6.3	69.3	2.4	2.8	6.3	80.8
141	Oraberekiri	21	6.3	132.3	1.2	1.4	6.3	141.2
173	Wakama	26	6.3	163.8	1.2	1.4	6.3	172.7

Source: Adeyemo, 2002:72

The effect of land take on farming is clear. Although the amount of land used for oil production is small, by comparison with the total area of affected communities, in the Niger Delta, it has been proven that the effect on individual landholders can be devastating (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Roads and canals constructed by the oil companies to link their production sites also add to the ecological problems that undermines the economies of Oil Producing Communities. Unarguably, oil based environmental degradation has engendered the collapse of local economies; setting in economic distress (Naanen, 1995:21). As Enyia (1991:183) points out;

Oloibiri is a shadow of its former self. Farming which used to be the mainstay of the community's economy has been paralyzed, as farmlands have been destroyed, fishing activities grounded and aquatic life virtually castrated by many years of oil prospection and exploration.

Igoni (cited in National Concord, December, 1990:31) laments that Oloibiri men are giving up their traditional occupation due to the destruction of the river and fishes by oil spillages... there are no fishes any more.

This is a graphic illustration of what is obtainable in several Oil Producing Communities. Although these observations were made many years ago, they capture today's reality. It is discernible that the oil industry has led to occupational displacements and loss of means of livelihood. Significantly, viable alternatives have not been provided, either by the government or the oil companies. The question is, what happens to such persons? How do they cope with displacement?

The answer is that people are forced to migrate, and not voluntarily. People do migrate because there is no alternative. But how is this internal displacement? The migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, is imposed on the people by extremes of poverty, attributable in part, to oil based environmental degradation. Farmlands and fishing grounds constitutes the essentials of the people's productive forces. Their destruction therefore means alienating the people from their means of production. This necessitates the movement that takes two dimensions – rural urban migration and rural – rural migration. Those who move to the urban area become proletariats, and seek to be employed in the public or private sectors of the economy. The dilemma however is that they do not find jobs, either because jobs are not available or they are not employable due to low level of education or lack of skills. Many end up doing menial jobs, and largely settle in the slumps. They are not recognized as displaced persons, probably because they do not live in camps.

This is also true of those who migrate from one rural community to another. In most of the cases, you find fishermen migrating in search of productive fishing grounds. Generally, they create settlements in the host communities, and are clearly noted as aliens. In some cases, they live with host families or communities. It is proper to argue that even those who remain in their communities are internally displaced. The point is

that occupational displacements can be seen as an element of internal displacement. Due to occupational disorientation, people live in their own communities, as if they are aliens.

Clark, et al, (1999:9) have noted that:

Having lost their traditional subsistence lifestyle to pollution and other drastic changes in their immediate environment, many oil producing communities are now forced to buy their food... In Eket, Akwa Ibom State, where mobil's operations have reportedly led to the loss of fish populations along the coast, fishing is available only to those who can afford large boat engines and trawlers to venture into the high seas. The rest of the population must buy "ice fish" (frozen fish)... a practice totally unknown a few years back.

The dislocation of local economies by oil induced environmental degradation has diminished the capacity of individuals and groups to pursue their interests, in relation to other individuals and groups. Equally, it has necessitated migration or relocation, either voluntary or involuntary. This brings to the fore; the understanding that oil based environmental degradation induces internal displacements.

Concluding Remarks

The Niger Delta environment has suffered degradation as a result of the activities of the oil companies. We have stated that oil spillages, gas flaring, land take and construction activities of multinational oil companies have devastated and impacted the Niger Delta environment. The interrelatedness between this and underdevelopment; Poverty, Conflicts and violence, has equally been highlighted.

Similarly, we have also discussed the linkage between conflicts and internal displacements of persons in the Niger Delta. However, the relationship between oil related environmental problems and displacements have to a large extent been neglected by many observers and researchers in favor of conflict induced displacement. This paper in our mind has stressed to fill this gap. Displacement we have demonstrated is a definite

social condition that reduces competitive capacity and advantage among people. Oil spillages and gas flares, among other factors we hold, have induced internal displacements in the Niger Delta by aggravating the level of poverty in the area. For this reason, people's capacity for self-sustenance has diminished, leading to an unnecessary urban drift with some individual finding succor in other rural communities as settlers.

Our evidence may not be conclusive, but it is logical to argue that persons who relocate from their communities, either voluntarily or involuntarily, due to oil related environmental problems are internally displaced. The occupationally displaced, whose capacity for competition has been diminished and who live as alien in their own communities are equally displaced. This again brings to the front burner the urgent need to address the environmental problems of the Niger Delta.

Since Economic compensation and inducements cannot serve as panacea for prevention and preservation, the federal government should as a matter of urgency, compel the oil multinationals to adhere to standard operational procedures for oil exploration and exploitation. Modern technologies of extraction should be adopted by these companies to reduce the negative impacts of their activities on the environment and people. The policy on replacement of ageing pipelines should be pursued rigorously just as the 2008 date for the ending of gas flaring should equally not be extended.

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*** The United Reactive High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) puts the number of IDP's at 12.1 within (Zard, 2002).*

Commission for Refugee insists that the figure ranges around 800,000 persons. (www.idpproject.org).