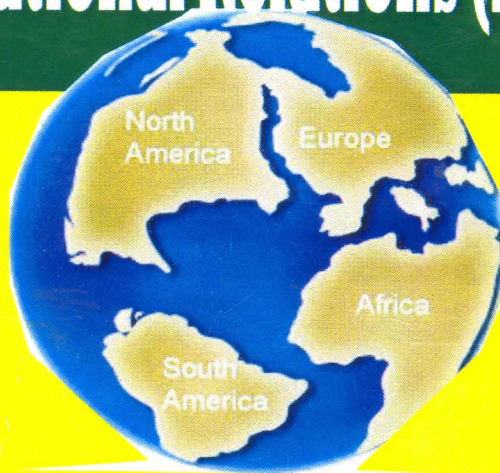




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**OIL EXPLORATION IN THE EASTERN NIGER DELTA REGION:
THE EXAMPLE OF EXXON MOBILE IN EKET, AKWA- IBOM
STATE, 1980-2016**

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Abstract

The Eastern Niger Delta region of Nigeria is endowed with abundant natural and human resources and enormous economic potentials. Exxon Mobile began exploration for oil and gas in the Eastern Niger Delta region of 1955, before Nigeria got her independence. The activities of the Exxon Mobile have always had a disastrous effect on the livelihood of the host communities. The company has provided limited employment opportunities following the Nigerian indigenization policy of the 1980s. Exxon Mobil operational activities also brought massive environmental degradation in Eket since oil exploration began in the area. There is poor infrastructural development, pollution of the land and waterways making agriculture very unprofitable. Massive exploitation of the area could also be said to be responsible for the militancy, kidnapping, violence, pipeline vandalism, armed robbery and other criminal activities that have engulfed the area. This paper therefore examines very critically the negative consequences of Exxon Mobil exploration activities in Eket and how the Company has underdeveloped the area. The study will adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to tackle the problem.

Keywords: Exploration, Exploitation, Degradation, Underdevelopment Resources

Introduction

The Eastern Niger Delta region of Nigeria is endowed with abundance of natural and human resources as well as other economic potentials. Eket is a town in Akwa-Ibom State; it is also a town known as *Idong Afianwa*. It is the second largest community in Akwa-Ibom State, a community known for sea foods with massive crude oil reserves that have affected the presence of Multinational oil Companies still operating in the area¹. The indigenous people of the area are known for their great agricultural produce such as fish, plantain, millets, soyabean, maize and vegetables among others.

The area of this study consisted of an ecosystem of swamps, mangrove and rain forests. This is the area and the terrain where ExxonMobil operates. ExxonMobil began its operation in 1955 as Mobil Exploration Nigeria

Incorporated. After unsuccessful operations in the former Northern and Western regions of Nigeria, the company was granted two offshore oil prospecting licenses and in 1964 it made its first oil delivery. Towards the end of 1968 almost 50 exploratory oil wells has been drilled by the company. In 1999 the Exxon and Mobil corporations came together, shortly after wards, third company emerged and so, Esso Exploration and Production Nigeria Limited, Mobil Oil Nigeria PLC and Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited, merged and became ExxonMobil². ExxonMobil, in spite of its high volume of offshore oil and gas exploration, has not really impacted positively on the Eket communities³.

ExxonMobil operations are all offshore and there are about 90 platforms covering over 3,200 square kilometres. The oil exploration activities in the area have been an ongoing activity for many decades in Eket and this has brought a negative effect on the livelihood of the host communities and the environment⁴. In Eket, the ecology is mainly that of mangrove forest which has been destroyed by oil exploration activities, and degraded the traditional agriculture and the occupation of the people. Environmental pollution has also generally affected their water, making fishing activities unprofitable and almost impossible because the aquatic habitat has been destroyed. Oil spillage and different chemicals and effluents are discharged into the water ways and have also caused a lot of ill health to the people and brought untold hardship to the host communities. Exploration has also caused a lot of coastal recession resulting in the pollution of water ways leading to high mortality among the fish and other aquatic animals⁵.

Exxon Mobile Exploration in Eket

The activity of ExxonMobil Company in the Eastern Niger Delta area is mainly off-shore. In the Eastern Niger Delta region Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, have only offshore oil exploration activities in the area. Off-shore oil exploration is a mechanical process whereby an oil well is drilled below the sea bed. Offshore drilling has its several challenges among which are risks of death of workers on the oil rig on the high seas. Deep water drilling as an advanced technology has generally helped the ExxonMobil to produce oil and gas under the sea bed⁶. Onshore exploration refers to the development of oil fields, gas deposits on land and this requires drilling through the underground deposit⁷.

The exploration of oil in Nigeria has to a large extent contributed to the economic development of the country, but in the Eastern Niger Delta area, a lot of havoc has been caused in the process of exploration and laying of pipelines across the region. It has affected the socio economic development of the people

and their environment, causing environmental pollution and degradation. Over the years this has gradually negatively affected the land in the area, resulting in low agricultural produce and yield⁸.

The oil production has suddenly taken the place of agriculture. In the pre-colonial and the colonial periods, the Eastern Niger Delta was popularly known for the production of agricultural produce such as palm oil which was exported to Europe. This was the primary occupation of the people of the region. The ExxonMobil has failed to reduce the damage on the land during oil exploration activities and the Nigerian government has also failed to sanction it for the pollution of the land. Environmental laws are not enforced to protect the environment and the people of the region. Lack of enforcement of environmental laws by the federal government of Nigeria has added to the suffering of the people in the area and the degradation of their land.

The people have not been adequately compensated over the years and this has brought about a lot of challenges among the people resulting in a rise in criminal activities, unemployment and poverty among others⁹. According to Ohwofasa Anuya Siyedogbon emphasized that because of the long neglect of the people's welfare by ExxonMobil and the Federal government of Nigeria, the people have been marginalized and therefore many militant groups have emerged resulting in several criminal activities and concluded that the multinationals encouraged violence in the Eastern Niger Delta¹⁰.

The coming of the ExxonMobil to the Eastern Niger Delta has been seen by some people as a sacrifice without benefit for the people of Eket. All the activism and criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta can be attributed to the neglect of the communities by the ExxonMobil. It is pertinent to note also that during the decolonization process the European countries ensured that the oil and gas deposits were controlled through their own companies like Agip, Mobil and Shell and these oil companies therefore ensured maximum profits and benefits for their home countries at the expense of their host country and host communities.¹¹

The Effects of Exxonmobile Exploration Activities in Eket

Since the pre-colonial period the pre dominant occupation of the people of Eket has been farming and fishing. During the colonial era, oil was discovered which attracted many companies like Agip, Mobil, and Shell among others. Many of these companies in the Eastern Niger Delta focused their attention only on crude oil exploration after Nigeria got her independence. ExxonMobil is one of the conglomerates that came into Nigeria during the era of colonial rule. The activities of oil exploration and the accompanying exploitation by the oil

actions of the youths resulting in a lot of insecurity in the land²⁴. Some of the deadly weapons coming illegally into Nigeria have also given the youths the opportunity to form militant groups in the area. The insecurity in Eket is largely attributed to the non-compensation of the host communities by the multinationals. The excesses of the multinational corporations should be addressed and they should also adopt a friendly and holistic approach to accommodate the indigenous people²⁵.

In Eket, business enterprises do not thrive because of insecurity engendered by the several factors earlier mentioned above. Investors find it difficult investing in Eket because of recurrent protests from the youths and the generally unfriendly business environment²⁶. However, Mobil has contributed very little to their host communities in the area of health, sports and education, but these achievements are not enough as compensation to their host communities. It is noted that, award of contracts in the company is mostly carried out by non-indigenes. Even the socio-cultural life of the people has been destroyed, their gods and divinity worship is of less important as a result of the injustice, oppression, domination, victimization and neglect²⁷. Another great effect of oil exploration in the area is the salient effect that most affect the people psychological. This has gone a long way by affecting the behavioural state of the people, particularly the vandalisation of oil pipelines and other equipment by the youths.²⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is pertinent to note that some of the problems facing the people of Eket and their neighbours such as unemployment have its roots in ExxonMobil exploration activities. The ecosystem has also been damaged, relegating agriculture which was once the main occupation of the people the background. Communal clashes, sometimes fatal had been engendered by the oil corporations through their habit of paying compensation to some communities to the exclusion of others. Poor infrastructural development, lack of scholarship schemes, employment, skill acquisitions at all levels in the area and non-engagement of the youths in the oil companies have encouraged criminality in the area. It is noted that Exxon Mobil has been undertook certain steps to address the social, economic and environmental problems among the Eket people. There is need for Exxon Mobil to re-direct its policy on corporate social responsibility in its host community. It conclude that this would bring about peace, accelerated socio-economic development of Eket and Niger Delta oil-producing area at large.

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