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## The Oil Extractive Industry in The Niger Delta: Impacts on the Livelihoods of Women

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### Abstract

How is the oil extractive industry affecting the livelihoods of women in the Niger Delta? This study explores the nature of the oil extractive industry in Nigeria and its impact on the livelihoods of women. The paper further focuses on the role of civil society in reconciling the interest of the oil industry and local economy of women in the Niger Delta. Relying on primary and secondary data as well as feminist theories, the study examines the case of Ijaw, Ogbia and Ogoni women, who have traditionally relied on fishing and farming as major means of income. The paper argues that women are the most affected by the oil industry through frequent spilling of crude oil in creeks, rivers, swamps and farmlands, where their sources of income is derived from. In addition, the civil society with women as active participants has only achieved little in terms of social justice.

### Keywords

**Women; Livelihoods; Extractive Industries; Niger Delta; Civil Society**

## Introduction and Context for the Study

Nigeria is ranked among the top 15 oil-producing countries in the world, producing up to 1,258,000 barrels per day ([World Population Review 2022](#)). With a population of over 218 million, it is the most populous country in Africa, rich in petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, tin, coal, lead, limestone, and other natural resources ([OPEC 2022](#)). The discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956 and associated extraction activities in Nigeria indicates negative consequences on livelihoods (see for instance [Helbert & O'Brien 2020](#)), in particular, for the women.

The extractive industries are central and they account for major revenues accruing to resource-rich countries around the world. However, in these industries men and women are affected differently, which makes a closer attention to the impacts on women important. This article situates the discussion on the importance of gender in contexts of natural resource extraction. Although a contested term, reflecting on the masculine and feminine divide ([Macdonald 2018](#)), gender is used with reference to women in this paper. Some scholars have drawn attention to the conflation of the two terms, citing the draw back to the advancements made in achieving gender diversity and gender equality ([Laplonge 2014, 2016](#); [Macdonald 2018](#); [Mayes & Pini 2014](#)). Discussions on the impacts of the extractive industries on women in resource rich areas attract significant attention locally and internationally ([Macdonald 2018](#); [Mukherjee 2014](#); [Oluduro & Durojaye 2013](#); [Omeire et al. 2014](#)). Resource extractive processes in the Niger Delta create complex and repeatedly contradictory socioeconomic varying consequences that result in agitations and conflicts across diverging issues that include the land, destruction of the environment, violence, health and other development issues. The literature reports that natural resource extraction, in particular oil and gas, rather than improve the developmental state of the local communities, has been more of a curse ([Acosta 2011](#); [Gudynas 2020](#); [WoMin 2013](#); [Ye et al. 2020](#)). Resource exploitative and destructive activities take away huge amounts of benefits from local communities to the benefit of key actors at the higher levels of management ([Pereira & Tsikata 2021](#); [WoMin 2013](#); [Ye et al. 2020](#)). The Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups have been very vocal on these issues in the Niger Delta of Nigeria (see [Mai-Bornu 2020](#)).

While much has been written on conflicts in Nigeria, little is known about women's roles even though Niger Delta women have played a key role in mediating non-violent oil protests ([Mai-Bornu 2020, 2019](#)), and in the North, they have lived through the Boko Haram, ethno-religious and indigene/settler crises. Instead, studies on the conflicts in Nigeria tend to focus on generations of young men denied social spaces for political participation ([Aghedo & Osumah 2015](#)). Most studies have tended to take a 'top-down' approach in speaking about women, rather than working with them to research their lived experiences ([Gasztold 2017](#)). Reflecting upon various arguments advanced within the contexts of exploitation, inequalities, marginalisation, and gender brings up questions about whose voices are actually heard and/or amplified as it relates to resources and livelihoods. The literature concurs that women are victims during conflict and peacebuilding ([Bias & Gurler 2020](#); [Mwambari 2017](#); [Olaitan & Isike 2019](#); [Tobach 2008](#)). Would the women affected by oil extraction and exploitation activities in the Niger Delta be among the most fortunate and joyful in the world if injustice had not existed and natural blessings had not been tampered with ([Abah 2009](#))? Here I am in 2022 reflecting on the key aspects of this insinuation, by simply asking 'How is the oil extractive industry affecting the livelihoods of women in the Niger Delta? Interviews were conducted in English and Pidgin English languages with 49 women between 2018 and 2020 in local communities in Bayelsa and Rivers states in Nigeria, using participatory video. These are ordinary community women, not those with political roles. In my discussions with these women, the issues raised revolve around natural resources and a lack of voice. The sentences have intentionally been interwoven with interview transcripts in order to be faithful to the words of the women.

The conflation of natural resource extraction and gender approaches tend to overlook the active roles played by women ([Hofmann & Cabrapan Duarte 2021](#)) and in particular, the agency of women based on the unquestionable power of patriarchy. Furthermore, scholars such as [Echart & Villareal \(2019\)](#) and [Leinius \(2020\)](#) are of the opinion that women's contribution to local knowledge on extractive industries are important and should be recognised. Paying closer attention to empirical studies on the subject, I reflect on what extractive activities mean for women in the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta and what can be theorised from that. The paper argues that women are the most affected by the oil industry through frequent spilling of crude oil in creeks, rivers, swamps and farmlands, where their sources of income is derived from. And in the process, these push the women who are actually wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, girlfriends and most importantly responsible for providing for their families, away from their sources of livelihoods, leading to frustrations and the feeling of impotency. Based on the various roles they play in such societies, women do exist as part of civil society ([Mama 1999](#); [Ikelegbe 2005](#)), particularly in terms of their survival in environments where resources are extracted for the benefits of the state.

In addition, the civil society with women as active participants has only achieved little in terms of social justice. The objective of this article is to explore the nature of the oil extractive industry in Nigeria and its impact on the livelihoods of women. The paper further focuses on the role of civil society in reconciling the interest of the oil industry and local economy of women in the Niger Delta. I draw on primary and secondary data as well as feminist theories, focusing on the voices of some Ijaw, Ogbia and Ogoni women who have traditionally relied on fishing and farming as major means of income. It is even worse for women with the new extractive practice of oil multinationals migrating to deep offshore investments that leaves only little room for corporate social responsibilities.

Following this introduction and context for the study, the second section engages with the relevant literature, theory and methods. The third section focuses on what the women have to say; the intention is to give these women a voice to be heard locally and internationally. It speaks with rather than for the women in the Niger Delta. The paper ends with a reminder of the importance of feminist scholarship, that presents the voices of the marginalised without interpretation, and with a call for those who have power to use it to mitigate the detrimental impacts of the oil extractive industries.

## Literature, Theory and Methods

Focusing on whose reality counts, this study uses a participatory research methodology ([Chambers 1997](#)) as a form of decolonising knowledge production and is therefore an appropriate methodology to use with feminist theories. Researching local women's issues necessitates employing a methodological and theoretical framework that speaks with rather than for the participants. The analysis draws from 49 in-depth interviews using participatory video however, only the transcripts were used to support arguments made in this paper, as it is a written not visual piece<sup>1</sup>. Due to ethical issues, the women are not named in this paper. Participatory video was used as a documentation tool that brought to the fore real evidence ([Jacobs 2015](#); [Lemaire & Lunch 2012](#); [White 2003](#)). The film documented local women's experiences, needs and hopes, told from their own perspectives. It showed that women are an untapped resource for their soft influence on how societies and people work to tackle conflict in a more nuanced way. Giving a voice to the women can actually develop community capacity to stimulate action, and serve as a medium for conveying and influencing decision making at various levels. As a methodology, it enabled participants (women) involved to actively participate in the research ([Flicker & MacEntee 2020](#); [Mitchell & de Lange 2020](#)). Four preliminary workshops were held with identified participants in Nigeria, during which the project

1 One of the outputs of this research is a 28-minute film titled 'Bringing Women's Voices Back in: Gender and Oil Conflict in the Niger Delta.'

was discussed and the women were trained to use the video cameras. This opened up opportunities to answer questions the participants had. The women determined what was essential and how they wished to be represented ([Johansson et al. 1999](#); [Medie & Kang 2018](#); [Pink 2006](#)). Overall, it places emphasis on marginalised groups in the society, as a voice for the voiceless ([Fairey 2017](#)). The experiences of women interviewed captured an insider view in a lively way ([Lunch & Lunch 2006](#); [Schwab-Cartas 2012](#)) that makes it accessible to diverse audiences ([Miller & Smith 2012](#)). For the civil society, policy makers and international donor organisations, it is a medium for conveying and influencing decision making at various levels ([Lemaire & Lunch 2012](#); [Plush 2012](#); [Wheeler 2012](#)). Qualitative approaches were employed to analyse the data in this research, these were constructed, interpreted and written in this paper. The data are presented in the form of stories (voices) of personal lived experiences of the participants. To illustrate the true picture of the women's experiences, the narratives, stories and literature are interconnected in the process of knowledge production.

As the arguments go in the Niger Delta, destruction of the environment, inequalities, discrimination and livelihood issues are circumstances that have amplified women's vulnerability ([Helbert & O'Brien, 2020](#)). The extraction and exploitation of natural resources without their material reproduction sees to the damage and depletion of the environment ([Pereira & Tsikata 2021](#)). Scholars argue that extractivism and its associated impacts are gendered ([Pereira & Tsikata 2021](#)) and the literature is generally described as gender blind (see [Womin 2013; 2015](#)). Rather than women's roles mainly as caregivers in societies, [Rao \(1991\)](#) views women as they distinctly act in response to complicated environmental realities. He calls attention to ways in which women build social relationships with men within their resource rich communities ([Elmhirst & Resurreccion 2012](#)). The extractive industry affects women and men differently ([Macdonald 2018](#)), suggesting that women are more at the receiving ends of the destruction on the environment ([Ngabirwe 2014](#)). Within the context of Africa, Asia and the Americas, the arguments on extractivism and the strategies of wealth accumulation date back to the colonial legacy of forceful extraction and production of raw materials to the benefit of the colonisers ([Acosta 2011](#); [Rodney 1972](#)). This process as [Acosta \(2011\)](#) explains has manifested in various ways. Often referred to as neo-extractivism as seen in the present day, resource management is now linked to development issues nationally, through social policies and most importantly for the benefit of societies ([Gudynas 2010](#), p. 13). While on one hand this should be regarded with some positivity as it is about progress and possibly poverty reduction in Africa, the other side tells a different story when regarded with a gendered (women) lens.

Feminism is a critique of male supremacy, formed and offered in light of a will to change it, which in turn assumes a conviction that it is changeable ([Cott 1986](#)). Stories coming from the neo-extractivist communities are no different from the purely extractivist economies. Feminist scholars stress that these resources' extraction activities ensure that affected women are living continuously in unsafe environments, some even forced to engage in sordid activities like cultism, kidnap and prostitution in order to survive ([Helbert & O'Brien 2020](#)). The conflicts experienced in the Niger Delta have gone beyond militancy and resource control agitations. Cultism is now on the rise in Ogoniland, an area notable for nonviolence agitations, here again it is the women who bear the brunt of these activities.

Insights from feminist studies provide important contexts for investigating gender in natural resource extraction and exploitation, for example, feminist perspectives have been critical of the incorporation of issues situated within conceptions of relations between men and women ([Hofmann & Cabrapan Duarte 2021](#)). These issues have been paired with 'the perception of political, negotiated and contested elements of social relationships' ([Elmhirst & Resurreccion 2012](#), p. 3). In traditional African societies, women are domesticated and socialised into subordinate positions. In the process of holding off these traits, feminist political ecologists encourage us to see gender disparities in the way nature is experienced and even how the environment is inhabited ([Agarwal 1992](#); [Plumwood 1993](#); [Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter & Wangari 1996](#)).

Women are seen as the bearers of 'distinctive' feminised cultural norms, which puts women in less important positions in societies ([de Alwis, Mertus & Sajjad 2013](#)).

Women have also been associated closely with the environment and nature, ecofeminists ([Merchant 1980](#); [Shiva 1989](#)) stress the woman-nature link and for a female voice to be heard. Oil and gas extractive activities negatively affect the environment and, in the process, they weaken local livelihoods making women in particular unproductive for securing food for the family ([Rico 1998](#)). It is an established fact that women have engaged hands-on with the land while striving to provide for their families. A woman in Ogbia echoed this sentiment:

Women do most of the farming here. [...] women find it difficult to go to their farmlands. Sometimes when compensations are being paid, the men will not consider giving the women part of the money because they believe that they are just women. They don't have right on land but, they are the ones farming on those land, it is their crops that are on those land, but when money is being paid, they don't give to those women, these are things that cause family problems (Interview 6).

## Findings

In this section, the women speak for themselves about how the extractive industries affect their livelihoods. It is important at the stage to clarify that in the Niger Delta and other resource producing areas, it is not only the women involved in resource related struggles, the men are also involved. In this paper, the women are more central and closer to the environment than the men are. The issues raised in this section are built on very interesting and thought-provoking arguments Vandana Shiva made in her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (1988). In this book, she talks about women in nature. Shiva (1988) calls attention to nature as the feminine principle and the relationship that women have with nature as producers of life. Looking at this relationship with nature with a Niger Delta lens links to discussions on development and progress in the oil rich area, which scholars argue are not commensurate to what is expected in resource producing areas. Rather than reap the benefits of being the custodians of the oil, the arguments amplify destruction of nature to the detriment of communities and cultures that depend on the environment for survival.

Findings suggest the complex relationship between men and women in the region. Going back to the argument raised by [Elmhirst and Resurreccion \(2012\)](#) on the contested elements of social relationships with regards to women's perceptions of political, negotiated and contested issue, an Ogoni woman in the Delta affirmed that:

In this side of the world, you are like a second-class citizen and when decisions are being taken, you are seen as a secondary. Maybe secondary is patronizing, you are seen as a tertiary, so you are of no consequence in the whole process whereas you are the fore, you are the one affected, you are the one going through the whole experience but you are not considered in the whole process (Interview 1).

Subsistence farming is generally practiced in the Niger Delta, therefore, anything that affects the land affects the livelihoods of women, which makes extreme, the impacts of oil spills on the food providers ([Helbert & O'Brien 2020](#)). A woman in Ogbia opined that:

This oil everywhere, the food is not producing again. Before, if you put cassava, it will be big stem of cassava but now small, small things, it is the oil (Interview 4).

Another Ogoni woman confirmed this view:

At the bottom of the line in every conflict is the woman. The Niger Delta is very prone to conflicts of different kinds, it could be communal crises, this community against the other. Sometimes it is politically motivated, sometimes it is actually not political, just the normal crises. Even when the females are not the

ones directly involved in the conflict, you find that they are the caregivers, they are mothers, they are sisters they are daughters and so ultimately, they find themselves at the fore of the conflict. During an interview, an Ogoni woman explained that,

‘Who do you find at the fore of everything? You find the women are the most affected. How are the women palliated in all of this process, how are the women carried along? Nobody wants to hear what the women have to say’ (interview 1)

Feminist connection to specific viewpoints about women and strategies required to better their livelihoods should be regarded in terms of the affective power of deeply held beliefs about women ([Cornwall 2008](#), p. 145). The discovery of oil and gas among other vital natural resources in the Niger Delta raised many hopes, including the belief that women will live a better life, support their families and possibly substantial job opportunities. It is essential to understand and interpret local women’s experience in the context of extractive processes in this region and the associated impacts on women’s livelihoods.

## Women’s voices from the Niger Delta

A woman interviewed revealed that:

If you go to the river, you will see what is happening. We normally go to the river and fetch water to help ourselves. Even if you don’t have something to drink, at least we use that one to bath, to wash our clothes, flushing of toilets. Now as I am speaking, you cannot use a bucket of water to go and fetch water again because of all the river is flooding with crude oil. Our fishes are dying anyhow if you go there, you will see it (Interview 2).

Although Shiva (1988) associated nature with the women in India, women in the Niger Delta also share an intimate relationship with the environment. For the Ogoni women for example, the land is blessed, therefore, anything that affects the land affects the Ogoni woman. Women are affected in various ways by oil extraction activities because they engage primarily in farming, often referred to as production of life ([Mies 1984](#)). As a woman in the Delta explained:

The diesel, kerosene and all those kinds of goods that they are using have made the water to spoil, so we can’t make use of the water any longer (Interview 3).

[Helbert and O’Brien \(2020\)](#) reveal that the gradual degradation of the environment has led to overwhelming and destructive shocks on women, the caregivers in the society. For instance, acid rain, gas flaring, polluted land and rivers have negatively impacted subsistence farming, which is the main avenue for food production in most of the resource producing areas. A woman from Ijaw the community also echoed this sentiment:

The oil destroys many of our land, our water and everything, we lack of fish, everything that we get from water is condemn, the land condemn (Interview 5).

This suggests that women in the Niger Delta are indeed an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and practices as advanced by (Shiva 1988). The livelihood impacts are serious because the so-called producers of life (women) are at the mercy of decision makers who tend to ignore the reality of what affects the vulnerable inhabitants of communities. Poverty is on the rise in these areas.

The gendered division of labour in these areas sees women primarily responsible for the subsistence of their families. As producers of life, a lot is expected of them. The traditional Niger Delta women, as in the traditional African society, is central in the running of the family. Most of the women in this study were not married, they did not have supporting spouses. They have sole responsibilities for taking care of their

families, including feeding, housing, education, health and a lot more. In an ideal situation, these are groups that should be considered early when support comes from oil companies operating in the region, but most of these women are not accorded this support. These sentiments were echoed in the following statements:

Chances are not given to especially the women, like the work that come in from the companies Shell and the rest of them, mainly the work is being given to the men, we the women we are left behind. Because as full Nigerian's we as women and the men we have equal rights but we are not really given the attention we need in the aspect of work (Interview 8).

By the time it gets to paying of compensation sometimes they pay this money to wrong people and this thing cause community crises. Sometimes, only one or two persons in the family that is being concerned, they will just go and collect the money and sideline the other members of the family, these are issues that bring crises in the community (Interview 6).

Feminist political ecologists underscored ways in which gender inequalities and constructions are deeply rooted in biology, these differences vary ([Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter & Wangari 1996](#)) and are sometimes context specific. Resource extraction activities tend to destroy the environment and, in the process, subject women to unproductive means of securing food for their families. An interesting point raised during one of the interviews was the position of women in resource conflict affected environments.

When the crimes in these areas continue to increase, you find that, who are the criminals, they are the sons of women; who are the first targets of these criminals, they are the women, who are seen to be vulnerable without any form of defence (Interview 1).

An Ijaw woman interviewed raised concerns about the inactions of the Nigerian state:

The question is what is the government doing about it? If you go in Kalabari in Rivers state, if you go to those places that are in the Atlantic Ocean you will see these platforms, these oil companies their platforms and you will see the villages. You will see this place shining, light, this place is in darkness and when they are mining or drilling, you are on your bed feeling the vibration, in the night you are in darkness. The government is supposed to make those communities too to be the same way. We expect the government to be disciplined, if you are disciplined you will not be corrupt (Interview 9).

One important finding is the reliance of families faced with severe economic hardships on very young women and daughters. It is an accepted fact that poverty increases the vulnerability of the poorest, hence the established pattern of women engaging into acts of prostitution for survival. Some of the Ogbia women I interviewed as part of this project indicated major failures along family lines. As two of the women affirmed:

Some parents do not even know where their thirteen years old girl is sleeping, they don't care, they are not ready to take responsibility. As soon as you are up to one stage, they believe you are old enough to take care of yourself. In fact, they are even expecting the child to bring to them even when the child has nothing doing (Interview 6).

Some mothers they don't have any time for their children. When it is time to go to bed and children are not around, they don't have time, they will go to bed and the children have been walking around. All those ones you are encouraging the child to go and join bad gang (Interview 16).

A 2002 study conducted by Ukeje et al. highlighted why women in six oil communities in the Niger Delta engaged in informal prostitution as a result of diminished access to farm land and fishing waters. Some of the women I engaged with echoed similar issues. I came across very young mothers sometimes with five or

more children from different fathers. Three young women I interviewed raised concerns about the increase in prostitution in their area:

The way we ladies sell our bodies for money for men, is not really good. If we had an opportunity of having job or one thing or the other, we women and ladies will not be selling our bodies for money (Interview 13).

We Niger Delta women we are really suffering in the hands of men. You know sometimes as a growing woman you plan, you wish so many things. If I got married, I will be like this, like this with my home but at the end of the day, you see that your husband is a cheater. He will go out, in terms of marriage, let me put it in that way, he will go out sometimes even abandon you and the kids (Interview 14).

Another opined:

I don't have helper, I don't have anybody. Is just recent that I locate my dad's place so I carried the children to go and stay with their father, because if I carry the children to stay with me it will make me to move from one man to another because no help. If the children stay with you, you will think for the feeding, think of the school fees, think of the clothing of the baby and even your own self. So, I said, the father was insisting to take the children so I decided to give him the children (Interview 15).

These suggest the dashed hopes and optimism experienced by some of the affected women. Rather than improved living conditions and job opportunities for some of the women, the extractive industries do not imply oil as a blessing and a path to development and prosperity. The disappointment of women increases daily because the women feel that the state and the oil companies have neglected them. In a situation where women's means of livelihoods are corrupted to the extent that it severely affects their capability to provide for their households, this causes more problems in the society. Some women tend to take a step back while others lean towards criminal activities. Two of the women highlighted these:

This crude oil is at the backyard, my backyard but it is government that is taking it, we, we no get anything to do with it. Upon that, they are not looking at us, they no turn face look at us, they no dey give us any good position, for even our leaders to fit recognize us (Interview 7).

The problem the women have is that they feel and have this inferiority complex. They get scared when they see the men gather to come out to speak their mind, to say what they feel is right for them. But few ladies in the community we've been trying to break that (Interview 6).

The correlation of these issues to civil and political rights as well as their social and economic rights shows that they are greatly disadvantaged. The abuse of women as [Bunch \(1995, p. 14\)](#) explains is part of the larger socioeconomic and cultural complication that entangles women. These make them more exposed to abuses that cannot be portrayed as exclusively political or solely as a result of the failure of the Nigerian state in this case. Worthy of note are some additional detrimental impacts coming from the extractives sector that seem to fall disproportionately upon women. A major example that is salient yet ignored is the psychosocial impacts of the extractives on women. A woman leader raised concerns about attacks on women and its implication for health:

Most of the women lost their husbands, most of them lost their children, we have lack of many things, food to eat, where to sleep and all these things affecting us we women. Some of our women just run mad because of all these things (Interview 5).



Another interview revealed that:

The young ladies here suffer violence in so many ways. A lot of rape cases and people don't do anything about it, in fact when such cases happen, they blame the ladies for being raped (Interview 6).

Thus, among the factors that affect the livelihoods of women are rape and the culture of silence in the region. In Ogoniland as an example, informal discussions revealed that, due to the increased attacks on women by cult members, women became very scared of going to their farms. A mother validated these assertions in the following statement:

When they try going out to get water or to go out or to go farm these people will rape them. [...] Talking about a situation where five persons can enter in a house and rape just one particular person, what will happen to that person? The community is not in peace. As if that is not enough, when we talk about killing, they will come in like that they don't want to know who they are looking for is not there, what they do direct is to rape you, after raping you they send you to your grave (Interview 11).

Some women groups have achieved a wide-ranging outlook that are helpful to the women as agents of action and even mobilisation in the Niger Delta. This could be linked to the description of civil society being more than a formation ([Ikelegbe 2005](#)). These organisations although informal, comprises the rural, social, communal, ethnic, religious and development organisations ([Ekeh 1992](#); [Ikelegbe 2001, 2003](#)). Women's groups including the Federation of Ogoni Women's Association (FOWA) and Ijaw Women Connect (IWC) are engaged in active struggles for justice and access to benefits through associational forms. Discussions with some of the key actors of these groups indicate the active roles women play in terms of popular struggles ([Ikelegbe 2005](#)), civil challenge through traditional forms of resistance, as well as peacebuilding. It is important to state that some of the communities I visited are without any gendered grouping as a network of support seen in the Ogoni and Ijaw groups. FOWA as an example engages in preaching nonviolence to women at the local level. As some of the women explained:

First our leader (Ken Saro-Wiwa) told us MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People) is nonviolent struggle organization. We should use knowledge and biro, not knife and gun. He told us, women organize yourselves because we are the people that will back him. Because if women are not at the back of the younger ones they cannot go well. And that was why women were so involved. You can speak to your husband, you can speak to your children, and they will listen to you (Interview 18).

We have been going from town hall to town hall from various communities to campaign about nonviolence in Ogoni (Interview 19).

We advise women those in the chapters to go home for their meetings and we discuss peace. And they should talk to their children because when your child is going out though many at times when they go out you don't know what they really do outside until the information will come to you. It is there and then we advise women as you are going make sure that you advise your child, boy or girl (Interview 20).

In relation to women at the communal and grassroots levels, on the Ijaw side, IWC serves a vehicle that ensures that jaw women are treated equally with respect regardless of their gender type. This group works with many broken women in their communities. One of the leaders explained how they engage with affected women in their areas:

We to talk to ourselves like friends. We talk to ourselves like women, what are you passing through, what do you think can be done differently. If you give the local women an opportunity, if you go

down to the locals, give them opportunity to interact with you, bury the fears in you, you will have a lot of revelations (Interview 21).

No support from the government but sometimes they see you to say that I applaud you. And beside the numerous awards, everybody sees your jobs and everybody wants to identify with you, to give you awards of excellence for being effective, for performing and stuff like that. But that encouragement is not there (Interview 21).

Although these are laudable roles played by women at the local level, we have to note that it is not a one size fits all in the Niger Delta. I came across organisation referred to as Community Development Committees, each with a woman leader in the community. The women leaders are supposed to be the voices of women thereby protecting their interests against the predominantly male voices. A woman in Ogbia explained that:

The CDC are the overall of the community, they are the people responsible for the community, development of the community, doing everything in the community, the CDC are the important people to take control of the community (Interview 22).

However, interviews conducted revealed that most of these women take the back seat during discussions, with the men taking decisions for and on behalf of the women. Even though some women are included as part of the leadership, most of their roles are relegated to taking care of catering during meetings and other social activities, not in taking decisions. Leadership is one of the challenges facing women in the region. As some women in Ogbia affirmed:

Like my community, they don't give women that privilege of leading, of leadership like in the CDC (Interview 22).

Women have to be involved in the CDC and also the youth body because when it comes to community sanitation like clearing the rivers, clearing the water side and clearing of the street, they say girls are youth too. They ask us to go with the men and do all this community work but, when it comes to job opportunities and other empowerment programmes the women are not carried along (Interview 6).

It seems as if there are always missed opportunities for women in this region. The disappointment of these women calls for serious attention. Some have accepted the existing situation without thinking of ways to disrupt the norm in terms of how the activities of extractive industries impact the livelihoods of women. Rather than confront the leaders in the societies, some prefer to lean towards the Church, hoping for some divine intervention.

If the women can really open up and tell you what they are going through, a whole lot needs to be done. We bottle up our emotions, express it in our religious activities, and say there is a world hereafter where we shall all be taken care of. A paradise of sort (Interview 1).

Another maintained that:

Even in the Bible, the voice of woman is the voice that God use to hear first. The cry of a woman is very dangerous, so at least if women gathered and cry there will be peace (Interview 23).

On the other side, some of the women I engaged with are determined to make progress even when the support is not available to them. Some have vowed to continue making loud noises until their voices are heard and not based on gender any more.

I don't have anybody to help me but if you want to do it, if you believe in yourself, you can do it. So, I want them to come up and join hands with us so that we make our state and our community a better place (Interview 14).

The voices in this section offered very emotive personal insights from various communities into the major issues affecting the livelihoods of women. Firstly, it was essential to reflect on the different ways the environment affect men and women (Rao 1991) and the gendered division of labour within feminist lenses. Secondly, the ecology of women's lives and the closeness to the land (Shiva 1989; Merchant 1980) details the insider position of women based on ownership and engagement with their farmlands. For Ogoni women in particular, what affects the land bears directly on them. Thirdly, being citizens and contributors to the economy of their various communities fails to alleviate their marginalisation in the civil society. The choice of participatory video proved vital to the credibility of this research; this brought a sense of awareness and clarity on similar lived experiences of other women within the same region to these very close but very distinct ethnic groups.

## Conclusion

In this paper I demonstrated how the livelihood of the women in the communities I visited are affected by activities of the extractive industries. I argued that women and men are not impacted equally. The women are the most affected by the oil industry through frequent spilling of crude oil in creeks, rivers, swamps and farmlands, where their sources of income are derived from. As key members of the civil society, the women have only achieved little in terms of social justice. I utilised participatory video as a documentation tool that ensured my participants voices are heard as against my own voice as the researcher. Feminist insights were used to advance arguments made within the perspectives of the affected women. It is important to restate that in the part of the paper, I focused on the voices of those affected which sits very well within arguments raised in terms of voices that count in the production of knowledge when studying resource related issues in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. This was deliberate as the intention was to speak with rather than for the women who participated in the study. It is their stories that are being told so they must be given a voice.

The analysis suggests the need for a closer look at the gendered implications of extractive activities. Interview evidence indicates the clear connection women have to nature as they depend on the environment for their livelihoods. As producers of life, feminists have argued for women's agency in the struggles for their basic rights, in particular, the right to food and freedom from violence associated with resource issues. I agree with the observation that extractivism has moved away from affected populations (women in this case), rather than focus on dousing tensions, it reinforces political-socioeconomic norms that intensify inequalities and marginalisation of vulnerable groups. A lot needs to be done and can be done on various fronts including, the Nigerian state, the multinational oil companies (such as Shell) and also at the local level. The Nigerian state needs to wake up from the existing slumber and attend to the issues affecting women in the area to avoid more derailing and joining criminal groupings in a region that is volatile to violent conflicts.

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