

## THE CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF CREEK DWELLERS IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*One of the major problems facing creek dweller in oil producing communities is adaptation and health challenges. Depletion and pollution subject creek dwellers to harsh conditions in the phase of limited adaptation channels. While oil workers who move from Air Conditioned (AC) house to AC car and to AC office indulge in elaborate exercise to eliminate excess calories, creek dwellers appear malnourished with deep hunger which predisposes them to numerous health challenges. The paper highlighted the challenges and adaptation strategies of creek dwells in selected oil producing communities in Delta State. Explanation of core variables anchored on the theory of social exclusion. Focused group discussions, questionnaire and in-depth interviews were used to generate data. Total of 330 participants were sampled. Out of these, 11 interviews were granted. Thus, instrument triangulated both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Data was analyzed using percentages and thematic extraction of responses. Findings revealed that there is connectivity between oil exploration and the health challenges suffered by creek dwellers (96%). While the resource found within the region is a blessing to external bodies, it is a curse to creek dwellers. A total of 97.6% decay, high prevalence of communicable disease, poverty, illiteracy and hunger were predominant. They reported difficulty in making a living. Life chances are slim with oil exploration which worsened their condition. They harbor toxics, little illness knocks them down and in most cases this terminates their life. The consciousness of exploitation instigated some attacks which disrupted normal activities. Unfortunately, the effects of this attacks fall back on the local dwellers and not the target group.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Creek dwellers, Health challenges, Adaptation strategies.

### **Introduction**

The region called Niger Delta in Nigeria is blessed with numerous natural resources, amongst which is oil. These resources are found to be in abundance around the creeks. This attracted exploiters and unfortunately left the creeks in deplorable conditions. The existing conditions as at the time of the research make them vulnerable to unpleasant environmental conditions. Apart from the fact that oil exploration leads to deforestation, it also pollutes the ecology. Oil drilling and conveying equipments occupy large area of land therefore rendering many hectares of lands inaccessible. The petrochemical gadgets effluents generate solid waste which pollutes the environment (Uzoekwe and Oghosanine 2011). These effluents are indirectly ingested by the people through the food they consume. These expose the people to major or minor health problems. The gastrointestinal and hematological effects of pollutions are unquantifiable (Okoye and

Iteyere 2014). The people lack good housing which is a basic necessity of life and a pre-condition to healthy living. According to Lawrence (2006), housing is a physical and social necessity of life which holds a place of strategic importance in development. Lack of good houses heightened the challenges confronting the people.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While the creek dwellers suffer great effects of environmental deterioration, researches on the health challenges of creek dwellers are trivialized. Although, attention has been geared towards the Niger Deltans in general on issues pertaining to oil exploration and spillage but those who bear direct consequences of oil exploration and related activities are not given adequate consideration. Many channels have been created to harness resources and facilitate its distribution based on derivation to oil producing communities; report revealed that it seldom gets to the people at the

grass root. It is the creek dwellers that bear direct consequences of oil exploration, oil spillage and gas flaring. They rarely benefit from the royalties emerging from oil exploration. Apart from environmental pollution, fish and other animals consume these effluents-organic and inorganic materials. These fishes and animal are ingested by people especially creek dwellers because that is the main source of protein. This pose great treat to health for the creek dwellers. Therefore it is appropriate that researches are devoted to explore the health challenges of creek dwellers. Based on findings, adaptation strategies will be built. Findings if implemented will address the deplorable condition in the creek and the health challenges of the dwellers will be mediated. Thus, this will ensure peaceful coexistence.

### Literature Review

#### Creek

Creek literally means an environment surrounded by water ways. In a local sense, creek connotes swampy region that harbor plants and animals. A suitable place for hiding where all forms of activities takes places. Idiomatically, creek is slang among the Warri people which denote an unfortunate predicament or inextricable position. It is a place which lack comfort, is a difficult terrain or seemingly an environment with hopeless situation. According to the free encyclopedia of Wikipedia (2014), creek is a stream or an inlet of the sea. The British dictionary define creek as a small inlet or bay narrower and extending farther inland than a cove. A cove is a small shelter bay. Creek in essence is a natural stream of water normally smaller than and often tributary to a river. It represents a narrow winding passage or hidden recess. It is a shore of the sea, specifically an estuary (Wikipedia 2014).

The creeks located in Warri and Sapele are surrounded by small stream, often shallow. They are intermittent tributary to a river. Observation revealed that creek is a channel or stream running through a salt marsh. The creek dwellers engage in fishing and farming. Few engage in tree felling for the production of planks and charcoal. The children of many creek dwellers join their parent in hunting and fishing. Those who are small and too weak to involve themselves in farming and fishing activities stay back at home.

Impact of Oil Exploration on Health was rated high. Excessive discharge of organic matter into the river

results to deterioration of water quality (Aghoghovwia 2011). Lack of maintenance and activities of saboteur degrade the ecosystem. This in turn affects the people's health. Oxygen is essential to life but the air quality is polluted. The inhalation of gas and other non visible particles from the petrochemical plants lead to trachea problems. Water temperature becomes higher with the discharge of effluents into the creek river (ibid). It has been observed that the discharge of excessive quantities of organic matters, inorganic matters and solid waste are the most common form of pollution and threat to health among the creek dwellers.

Considering the effect of health and environmental implications of gas flaring, the Ministry of Environment proposed a zero gas flares policy in Nigeria (Ajibade and Awomuti 2009). The oil producing companies in their various regions jointly attack the policy as technically not feasible. This has not been implemented or executed till date because it is capital intensive and the impact does not affect the technocrats. While various attempts have been geared towards researching in to the environmental impact of oil productions, findings and aspirations of community members are relegated after the research is over. Even when attempt is made in providing fund for basic amenities to better the life of the people, such funds end in the pockets of highly connected few.

Oil workers find teenage girls within the host communities readily available to satisfy their sexual urge. These unregulated sexual lifestyles leave behind an amazing bulk of venereal diseases. They leave behind morally polluted girls who most times become school drop-outs (Aghalino 2000, Ajibade and Awomuti 2009). Heat from gas flare causes intense heat. Apart from the heat emitted by gas flared, fire outbreak on vandalized equipments cause great heat. This affects the quality of life and longevity. One of the greatest effects of oil exploration is massive destruction of life. Frequent attack which leads to execution of activist and agitators is the most painful aspect of oil exploitation among the numerous challenges.

Effects of Oil Exploration on Occupations of creek dwellers are enormous. The forests suffer depletion of resources. If the lands are not forcibly taken by the companies through the help of the government, they are populated. Creek dwellers who are basically farmers are forced to switch to other occupations as a result of environmental degradation in their land (Ikporukpo 1978).

Farmers and Fishermen who are unable to adjust usually migrate to nearby urban centers such as Warri, Eket, Port-Harcourt and Ughelli in search of greener pastures (Ajibade and Awomuti 2009).

Oil Spills and Ecological Degradation are evident in the creeks. Incessant fire outbreak resulting from dilapidated equipment destroys green forests. Pollution which emerged from oil spills impact on the streams and farmlands. Oil spills and fire that follows the activities lead to fire outbreak. The coastal surroundings are contaminated. Plants, creeping vegetables, animals, flora and fauna get roasted by fire outbreak. It takes a decade before the soil regains its nutrients. Unfortunately, as long as oil drilling and transportation with dilapidated equipment and sabotage activities that leads to calamity continues, occurrence of incidence abound before a decade when the forest will be able to regain its nutrients. Fire engulfs the region on a frequent basis. There is degradation of ambient air quality that is inhaled.

Housing in the Creek is poorly built. The density of residential dwellings is lower as some space is left between individual buildings which are basically makeshift (Abotutu 2014). The reason for the existing pattern is that households are smaller in the creek. Most of the inhabitants are indigenes who hail from the towns and villages around. They migrate and build their houses where they can have adequate access to scarce resources. With oil explorations and incidence of spills, the pressure on available resources became higher compare to creeks that there are no oil stations located within them.

Majority of the houses that are built by creek dwellers are made of mud walls and tatches. Few are made with modern roofs. Few houses in the creek within the selected study areas have houses made of cement-mud walls. Smaller percentage is made of sand-Crete block walls. This reflects the local nature of the people and this is reflected in the type of houses built. They build their houses with local materials that are readily available. They also erect makeshift wooden walls. In general, mud walls with tatch roofs are readily seen to spread across the different creeks. Unfortunately, the local resources that are used in building these houses are destroyed during oil exploration.

Migration from the creek is high because of the unfavorable conditions. Some of the creek dwellers have relocated for the construction of plants, laying of pipes or because of the effects of oil exploration.

A total of 43% participant's revealed that majority of the people have lost their ancestral homes and traditional sources of livelihood. They have to migrate to cities where they have access to good infrastructure. They therefore upgrade and better their life. In most cases migration is rampant among the male folk. They abandon their wife and children and sojourn to the city. When condition becomes favorable, they often acquire a new partner whose new status may be commensurate to their present status. This create great problem for the abandoned woman and the children if any. It is therefore important that the region receive good care to avoid migration which poses as great threat to peaceful coexistence in the home.

The people especially the creek dwellers suffer greatly irrespective of the fact that, the "Crude petroleum from the Niger Delta accounts for over 90 percent of the total exports and foreign exchange of the Nigerian state" (Okumagba 2012). The emergence of arm or militia groups in the oil producing area is traceable to the perceived exploitation of the natural resources. According to Okumagba, "the exploration activities by the multinational corporation and the Nigerian State has resulted in environment degradation, contamination of soil and destruction of aquatic life, and water pollution which has been the main source of livelihood for the people of the Niger Delta" (Ibid). This has led to clandestine attack and continued struggle for the emancipation of the people for the development of the creeks. The failure on the part of the Nigerian government and the multinational corporations has given rise destruction of conveying equipments to confrontation.

According to Adati (2012), the deliberate cutting down of trees and oil spillages ongoing for several decades in the Niger Delta have contaminated rivers, stream and forest, which constitutes the major income source for the majority of the creek dwellers, which are mainly dependent on ecosystem services. Oil exploration has had disastrous impacts on the environment in the region and has adversely affected the people inhabiting the creeks. Odeyumi and Ogunseitan (1985) in their paper on oil and petrochemical industry in Nigeria emphasized the notable cases of pollution disturbances during the 25 years of its existence they highlighted the causes and effects on the social, economic, agricultural and ecological

characteristic on human and other biotic occupants of the oil region.

According to the World Bank estimates, oil sector accounts for 95% of Nigeria export earnings and 85% of the governments revenues as of 2009. These oil are largely explored from the creek region of the Niger Delta. Recently in 2010, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that the oil sector generate over 95% of Nigeria export earnings and about 65% of the government's revenue (Adati 2012). It was estimated that 36.2 billion barrels of oil reserves as of January 2010 has increased amidst the fuel scarcity in Nigeria. The creek dwellers are worst hit by effects of oil exploration.

### Theoretical Framework

Social exclusion theory has been adopted for the explanation of variables. Theory focused on the disadvantaged dispositions of creek dwellers in the society. Social exclusion is the process in which individuals or communities are systematically blocked (or denied of full access) from various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group who enjoy better opportunities. These available opportunities are fundamental to social integration within that particular favored group (Wikipedia 2015). Social exclusion "has increasingly taken over from terms like poverty and deprivation as a term for describing social division deprivation and disadvantage" (Dave 2015). Underpinning most of these terms was the idea that creek dwellers are disadvantaged members of the society who lacked adequate resources with which to achieve acceptable standards of well being and with which to participate in the customary activities of society (Townsend, 1979). Because of the threat the disadvantaged creek dweller become conformist, assimilative and tolerant of abnormal situations, social divisions and inequality.

Lack of education and unequal power relations negatively exclude the people from accessing resources and other required services. This results to social exclusion of persons or the entire community. They suffer alienation from resources found within their environment. The wide gap in level of education and exposure distance the community members from the oil workers who are involved in its exploration. Social deprivation and distanciation alienate and frustrate the people. This frustration induced aggression on the people.

### Method

#### Design

The study is descriptive; it explored the challenges of creek dwellers and the degradation effects of oil exploration in their immediate environment. The research is also cross-sectional in design. It is retrospective because it documented past experiences through interviews and documentation of health issues of the selected creeks. Also, it was cross-sectional in design because information was elicited at a single point in time from respondents who seem to suffer similar health challenges.

#### The study area

The study area, Warri and Sapele are located in Niger Delta. The "Niger Delta is located in the central part of Southern Nigeria. It covers a total land area of 7, 000km<sub>2</sub> and is the Africa's largest Delta" (Shell Petroleum Development Company Annual Report, 1997, Ajibade and Awomuti 2009). About one third of the land area which is located in wetland contains the third largest mangrove swamp forest in the world. Warri and Sapele with numerous creeks are chosen as the research area in the Niger Delta region. Choosing these two communities is due to the high level of oil exploration which degrades their environment causing decay thus predisposing the people to health challenges. Warri is latitude 5,31°0.012°N and longitude 545°0.000E.

The "city Warri has a unique history that has not been documented well enough by historians. The name Warri was applicable to the part now called Delta State under the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Its boundary in the North east was Nsukwa/Iseagu creek near Kwale and Aboh, Forcados River in the South east and Jaieson creek in the South west. This was later changed to Delta province". Warri is one of the major hubs of petroleum activities and businesses in the Southern Nigeria. It is a commercial city of Delta State and the city is one of the cosmopolitan cities in southern Nigeria comprising those who originally are the indigene of the city. They are the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw people. Warri is predominantly Christian with a mixture of numerous African traditional religions like most of the southern Nigeria. Although there are varieties of dialects, the common language in the region is Urhobo language. The city is known nationwide for its unique Pidgin English (Wikipedia 2014).

Sapele local government with large number of creeks which bears most of the land that are used for timber production and oil exploration activities was chosen as the research setting. Sapele LGA is the sixth largest LGA in Delta State and the third largest out of the eight LGA that make up Delta central senatorial zone. Choosing Sapele and Warri as the research setting was considered appropriate because of the predominant activities of oil merchants and the outcome of their activities which destroys life. Choosing the research site is also because of the industrial scale deforestation activities which led to the degradation of their ecology which sustained their life. Sapele is an Okpe enclave which covers a land area of approximately 500 square kilometers. Ughoton, Oton-jetty and Mayuku creeks in Sapele has a rich flow of streams through the town.

Ubeji creek, Jones creek, Ekan creek and Tori creek and Nana creek Warri were chosen as the research setting for Warri zone. Ubeji is located in Warri, Delta State at surface location of 366,140.12m East and 174, 200.08m North. It is situated beside Warri Refinery and Petrochemical Company (WRPC). Jones creek is located at longitude 180000N and latitude 190000E and 3350000E. It is drained by Nana creek to the West, Escravos River to the South and Jones creek to the North. Ekan creek in Warri has latitude of  $5^{\circ}3^{\prime}01''$ - $5^{\circ}3^{\prime}01''$ N and longitude of  $5^{\circ}40^{\prime}5^{\circ}44^{\prime}11''$ E. The creek which is 12km long takes its source from Effurun. Ekan creek flows into Tori creek at NNPC Jetty and empties into Warri river at Bennet Island, (Olomukoro, and Azubuiké 2009). They were chosen as the study site because of their typical nature that could be used in generalizing to other creeks in the Niger Delta.

#### **Study Population**

The total study population for Warri according to national population census of 2006 is 311,970 and that of Sapele is 174,273 (2006 national population and housing census) mean while projection for 2015 is estimated at 200,180 (2010 national population projection). Out of this population, 300 households across the selected creeks in Warri and 150 households in Sapele creeks were sampled.

#### **Participants**

Participants for the study are house hold heads, creek vigilante group, oil workers, health workers, traditional health practitioners and Niger Delta

Development commission personnel. Inclusion criteria are persons who are 30 years and above. And non creek dwellers were excluded from the study.

#### **Sample methods**

The sampling methods used were both probabilistic and non probabilistic techniques. While the research setting was purposively chosen because of the predominant activities of oil exploration, decaying ecology and incessant health challenges, the participants were randomly sampled. Few were snowballed. The overall goal of the research was to establish generalizable findings that are representative. This creates an understanding of the phenomenon of pollution and health challenges of creek dwellers in the context of oil exploration and environmental pollution.

#### **Method of Data Gathering**

The purposive Sampling technique and the Snowball methods of selection were used to select respondents that met the qualities of inclusive participants. Although stated numbers of respondents were stated prior to entrance into the field, the eventual random selection of respondents was based on the peculiar circumstances of the field and on data saturation. On the basis of willingness and informed consent, Key Informant Interviews were conducted with each of the following stakeholders, community heads, area boys, oil workers and bunkerers.

Key Informant Interviews were also conducted with each of the following participants; household heads, the director of the National Environmental Standards and Regulatory Enforcement Agency (NESREA) in the study region, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) for the creek community and the multinational companies.

#### **Observation**

The non-participant observation was a reliable instrument used for generating data for the study. This gave a dynamic for comparing data derived for the study. Observation was carried out through note-taking. This method enabled the researcher in capturing first-hand information on the social processes which underlay the unfolding realities on the phenomenon of oil exploration, health challenges and adaptation strategies. Dynamic actions and interactions in which relationships in the creek and between the companies unfolded were captured.

**Method of Data Analyses**

Qualitative data generated from field with the use of primary and secondary instruments were subjected to qualitative narratives as well as content and interpretive analysis. The analyses were in the form of percentages, textual themes, excerpts of repeated reviews and verbatim transcriptions.

**Ethical consideration**

The fundamental ethical principles of anonymity, confidentiality and informed-consent which guide research on human subjects were observed during the research. Prior to final entrance into the field, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the participatory percentage, to build confidence, trust and respect in the participants. Rights of participants to ask questions, right to findings and privacy as an individual were duly observed. Appropriate permission was sought from designated authorities in the selected creeks prior to and during the conduct of the full research. To ensure that researcher get informed consent which protect participants freedom from undue invasion, permission was sought from recognized heads of the study units and the individual participants before interviews and observations commenced.

**DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 showing the Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Age	Percentages	Mean Age
24-34yrs	21%	52.0±1
35-44 yrs	31%	
45-54 yrs	24%	
55-64 yrs	13%	
65yrs- above	11%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

From the above, 21% participants were within 24 to 34 years in age. While 31% fall under those who are 35-44 years old, 24% participants are age 45-54 years. This percentage is higher in the number of participants who fall into this age category because majority who were readily available and who volunteered to fill the questionnaires are youths. This is followed by 13% and 11% participants who are 55-64 and 65 years and above. The mean age of participant is 52.0±1.

Table 2 showing the Gender of Participants

Items	Percentage Response
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	63%
Female	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

The gender composition of the participants revealed that 63% are males while 37% are females. The percentage of men is higher because they were found all over the place at various parks, workshops and offices. Also the culture which subjects woman to subordinate class makes majority of the women to decline voluntary participation. Never the less, 65% women who leave early to their farms and bush markets contributed to the lower percentage of women participation

Table 3 showing the marital status of Respondents

Value Label	Items	Percentage Responses
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	23%
	Married	54%
	Divorced	9%
	separated	3%
	Cohabiting	11%

As at the time of the research, 23% participants were single and 54% are married. While 9% are divorced, 3% and 11% are separated or cohabiting respectively. Larger numbers are married because of the marital rituals of the okpe people which encourage them to maintain their marriage till death. Also economic situation demand a help mate in order to weather the storms of daily living. Exploration activities, spills and fire outbreak alter the ecology. This affects their socioeconomic means of livelihood. A total of 97% participants revealed that the people suffer health problem. Observation revealed that the creek dwellers suffer lack of preventive and curative health care delivery facilities. Urban health care delivery facilities are far from them. Hence accessing the facilities is difficult.

Oil workers and government officials send their children to schools abroad. They return to head big offices that have been worked out for them. The youths within the creek and environs are jobless because of high rate of illiteracy. Majority migrate to cities like Warri where they can better their lives. It takes up to a decade before they can adjust properly. Whenever there is job opportunity, the hard labour aspects are often offered to the creek dwellers. Among affluent alien workers, the poor indigenes look haggard, unkempt and unappealing. While creek dwellers suffer great hardship, frustrating conditions subject them to carrying arms. Oil workers and beneficiaries in government buy estate worth millions in Abuja. Here indigenes

of oil producing communities and creek dwellers live in abject poverty. To eat three times in a day is difficult.

They develop breathing problems; they find it hard to breath. They develop gastrointestinal and hematological effects of ingesting pollutions (Okoye and Iteyere 2014). Long inhalation of toxics subjects them to abnormal breathing and other lungs problems. Despite the large consumption of carbohydrate, they appear skinny and unattractive due to laborious energy sapping activities of farming. They develop skin rashes to which they use cutlass or other sharp objects in scratching them. Their skin can make someone vomit. Unlike oil workers, small boys and girls with skin shining like a mirror. They look polished and attractive. The offensive odor that emits from the body of creek dwellers repels people. They are avoided and denied free association.

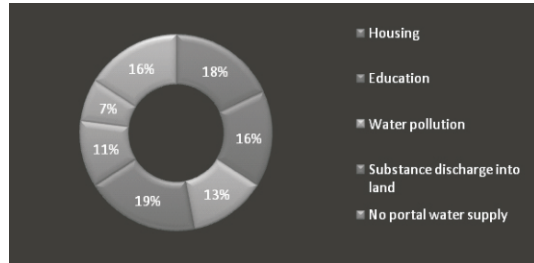
This situation is as it is because they have no light, they till the soil before they can eat. No light to cool their body, they sweat under the sun. The same cloths which absorb sweat are worn over and over again. Most times they wear torn cloths; one can easily navigate and view their bosom through the openings in the cloth. They do not mind, all they are concerned about is hard work to meet up with their challenges. Their best cloths cannot even be worn by oil workers as house cloths. The cloths appear horrible, yet poor creek dwellers call them 'Christmas cloths'. The following table shows the basic points that arose as their major problems which subject them to health problems.

**Table 4 showing the challenges of creek dwellers**

	Value Labels	Percentage
1	Housing	18%
2	Education	16%
3	Water pollution	13%
4	Substance discharge into land	19%
5	No portable water supply	11%
6	Typhoid	7%
7	Skin Rash	16%

The table above shows that the challenges of the people cut across major necessities of life. With no proper shelter, the people cannot talk of education and proper dieting and pollution control

This above data is made clear by the doughnut chart below.



Housing condition is generally poor. Most of the houses are temporary structures made with thatch and ply wood. During rainy season they suffer water drops inside the house. The intensity of the sun and sun rays into the houses made with thatches makes life unbearable for the people. They manage pit latrine, bad odor emanating from the pit latrine further pollute the air. As time progresses, they become accustomed to the smell to the point that they cannot differentiate between the air oozing from the toilet and the real fresh air. Only visitor suffer the impact of the odor oozing from the latrine. Some who dwell very close to the river ease themselves in free range defecation into the streams and rivers which also serve as their major means of portable water supply. They also engage in what is called "short put" that is defecating in nylon or other objects, this is thrown away into the bush. They do not have sewage disposal plans. Year in year out, the waste gets decayed in the pit, this produce offensive odor. In rare cases, they add chemicals to reduce the waste when the latrine appears full with observable worms swimming in the pool of the waste. The gory sight is disgusting to visitors, but this appears normal for the creek dwellers.

They live in mud houses plastered with cow dugs. Cow dugs have become their cement and paints. When they were interrogated, they revealed that plastering the house with cow dugs makes the house cool. They also have makeshift dwellings which are constructed with temporary materials. Sleeping space is congested with poor ventilation in the rooms. From all indications, these people desire good condition to better life but they are marginalized and relegated.

They lack education; they can hardly afford to send their children to school. Their wards grow and join them in their farming business. This reduces their employment opportunities. The cycle of poverty

continues and the gap become wider as the day goes by. Their situation is compounded because they cannot speak good English. Their inability to communicate effectively on their own worsens their situation. The oil workers and government officials take undue advantage of these situations.

A total of 67% participants revealed that they suffer health problems. There are high prevalence rate of communicable diseases (Tonukari 2014). A total 76% confirmed that there is poverty, ignorance and hunger in the land. While the people agitate for improve nutritional status that promotes good health, they reiterated that good food and good environmental hygiene will alleviate their health challenges. Creek dwellers suffer lack of preventive and curative health facilities. Urban health care delivery facilities are far from their use. The people suffer similar health problems ranging from skin rash, sight, and joint to hearing problems. Dirty and decaying leaves pose as health hazards to inhabitants. Health official attribute poor health to lack of balance diet, inadequate medical facilities and carelessness of not paying attention to personal hygiene. Heavy metals discharged into the water and streams render it unfit for consumption. Because there is little or no other outlet of getting water, the dweller distills the water with alum. This they use for cooking and drinking. Alum itself is a chemical which long consumption pose as threat to human system. Crude oil pollution renders the water salty. This endangers the blood stream of creek dwellers who consume them both raw and cooked.

While the people prefer modern health care services, its unavailability deny their accessing and utilizing it. They have limited access to health care facilities. They have limited cash to pay for the services. This restricts them to managing their situation. With this lack of services and deprivation, productivity of the people is distorted by lack of good health. The people suffer lack of protein, the cheap source of protein-fish and animals are destroyed by oil discharge into the river and the soil. Incessant gaseous emissions from flares, engines and generators lead to air pollution which creates lung and breathing problems to majority. Particles released into the air causes eye problem and skin irritation.

High mortality rate, the people believe in traditional source of medication. They would prefer to use modern health care delivery facilities,

but non availability and lack of access leads them to sticking to their indigenous methods of caring for their health. They make use of traditional birth attendant. Antenatal services in modern health care delivery centers are absent in the area. Creek dwellers are the most disadvantaged group in oil producing communities. Poor water sanitation, lack of good education and food affect the people's way of life as well as health.

They lack adequate provision of infrastructure and public services necessary to sustain good health. Their drainages are mosquito infested. This leads to increase in illness such as malaria which account for high death rate in the community. This havoc of oil spills includes surface and ground water quality deterioration. It affects water quality in terms of portability, aesthetic value and its recreational function. The small creek community lack social amenities such as drinking water, electricity, schools, health facilities, civil centers and road. Poor sanitary conditions endanger their health. There is loss of economic and botanical trees that were used in treatment of common illness. Creek dwellers have to search for herbs in order to treat themselves. Oil spills dries up the creeping vegetables which are cooked and administered to family members for preventive or curative purpose.

The traditional beliefs of the people are destroyed. In some of the communities where the creeks are located, there are totemic animals and plants. These totems are worshiped with great rituals around November/December. Oil exploration activities exposed these totems to destruction and consumption by oil workers who are often foreigners. Since it is the people's belief, their extermination and extinction impact on the wellbeing and peaceful coexistence of the indigenes that are basically creek dwellers.

Their problem is further compounded by oil spillage which pollutes their only source of good water supply. The prevailing health condition among creek dwellers and degradation within the creek is made worse by oil spillage. The frequent oil spillage and pollution increase environmental problems. Oil is released into the rivers, land or coastal waters. The spillage damages the natural ecosystem and contaminates the drinking water. The effluents from operational activities which are discharged into the river without regards to aquatic environment endanger their life.



Ingesting the polluted water leads to high neonatal mortality rate. Ingestion of contaminated food causes dehydration. It impairs digestion and most times leads to death. A dip in the water shows oily particles-petrol. It leads to breathing and respiratory problem. The drilling of bore holes and wells as a source of water end in fruitless effort. The water is unfit for consumption because of contamination. Attempt to purify these water leads to wastage of the limited income acquired from farm produce.

Increase in creek population due to migration from urban centers heightened the burden placed on limited resources. Majority of the people who can no longer cope with high standard of living in the town migrate to creek where they can comfortably manage their life with little or no stress.

They dwell in low cost house walls made of thatches or concrete blocks. Thatch roof and wall made with mud are common in the creek. They make farm stead as their dwelling abode. They convert barn into house, they also live in pit house. Pit house are prehistoric house partially sunken into the ground. They also live in plank and plywood house that is house built with planks and ply wood in variety ways. This is one of the best low cost houses located within the creek. In most cases, snake creep into their houses because of the porous nature of the roofs and walls. Scorpion and frog dwell under the local earthen pots used in storing cool water. They hiss and sing till dawn while the people sleep. As such on a frequent basis, they get bitten or stung by snake or scorpion. No duplex, few bungalow, that is simple storey house without basement are inhabited by oil workers and relatives. While the creek dwellers meddle with poor condition of health and poor housing, oil workers erect castle, chattel and garage houses where they live life of luxury.

It was observed that there is correlation between dwelling in the creek and expression of deviant behavioral manifestation. Most creek dwellers see their condition as end of the road. As their source of livelihood gets destroyed all attempt is geared towards making ends meets by all means whether

legal or illegal. About 51% of the youths resort to vandalism of equipments. Oil installations and vital oil conveying equipments are damaged. This leads to fire outbreak which claims many lives as well as destruction of large area of forest.

The atmosphere is tension laden, evidence of frequent crisis were reported by the creek dwellers. Observation revealed wreckage of buildings, fishing and farming equipment as a result of the numerous crises. Clash between the communities and soldiers led to fatal death as a result of discharge from angry soldiers. The participants (57%) reported that the soldiers take substances that charge their body and make them unfriendly. Issues which are not supposed to create misunderstanding lead to frequent conflict and accident discharge which claimed the lives of innocent people within the creeks. The oil workers see the creek dwellers as enemies and are always battle ready. Little provocations lead to release of soldiers and bullets into the atmosphere. The people live in fear. Many has relocated, few are under the custody of security officials for revolting against the activities which endangers their lives.

Obviously the people live in perpetual fear. As if pollution is not enough, they are not only alienated from their resource but they are also subjected to live in fear in their immediate environment. The people are silenced with guns and bull dogs. Because the atmosphere is tension loaded, explosive sounds from the company lead to false alarms and a stampede. Any little sound that has the semblance like that of a gun subjects the people to taking to their heels. This is because to them their lives are not saved. No pain is greater than the pain of oppression and the denial of expression. Many live in perpetual regrets and suffering for the discovery of resource and its exploration till little illness claim their lives at prime age.

It was observed that few creek dwellers who were employed developed hearing problems. They either operate high noise producing machines or are stationed to manage the generating house. One needs to talk loud for them to communicate effectively. Due to the deplorable condition in the creek and lack of access to security officials, creeks

have become hiding place for criminals and safe haven for militants. Abnormal activities has becomes order of the day. Militants often camp within the creeks for days in ambush for oil workers before they finally vent their anger on the oil installations if there is victim over a long period of time. A long tanker is used to convey the oil bunked oil. Attempts to revolt and cross firing between oil security officials leads to fire outbreak and loss of lives of innocent dwellers within the creek

The people revealed that government has not done enough to improve the quality of life of those living in the creek. Although various developments boards like the Niger Delta Development Commission NDDC, Delta State oil producing communities commission which was created to cater for lives of those who suffer impact of oil exploration exclude creek dwellers. Allocated funds are appropriated by chairman and other stalk holders. The creek dwellers often barely benefit from the fund allocated to oil producing communities. Their condition worsens and they become more frustrated as the organization created to better their life turn out to embezzle the funds. The problems in the creek are further compounded by squatters who settle there for illegal business.

### **Conclusion**

The conditions of creek dwellers continue to degenerate from bad to worse. The people suffer abject poverty. They live as neighbours with tension that emanate from insecurity and insufficiency. The frustration and provocative lifestyles of oil workers trigger violent acts against oil installations and oil workers. The problem becomes worse as they who agitate also become victims of their violent acts in the long run. The nonchalant attitudes of oil workers and the federal government worsen the situation. This inflicts more pains and agony on the people from birth till death. In sincerity, the creek dwellers who are human beings deserve attention when they seek redress for the environment which is bastardized.

### **Recommendation**

Long term projects and programmes that enhances living standard of the dwellers will help to reduce the challenges facing the creek dwellers. The

government and oil corporation should focus on long term development initiative. Implementation of projects and programmes should be monitored.

There is need to raise awareness on the degree of negative effects of oil exploration on Niger Deltans especially the creek dwellers who bear greater aspects of consequences of oil exploration. There should be transformation of knowledge, attitudes and practices of Oil Corporation and that of government. These transformations should secure the lives of creek dwellers. There is need to improve access to legal redress mechanisms and access to justice.

Dialogue should devise to successfully mediated conflicts that often arises intermittently. Animators should be empowered by the government and oil corporation to quell all harsh and endemic attack between the dwellers and the oil workers. Solutions to the problems should be disseminated on community radio stations to create awareness between the parties concerned thus reducing suspension and illusions of happenings.

Government should harmonize laws and legal processes to embed legislation that promotes and protects the security and rights of creek dwellers. Establish long term projects that can engage those whose source of livelihood has been destroyed. Support should be given to the creek dwellers. Train and sensitize all stalk holders on the need to build a cordial relationship based on equity. Challenge harmful activities of the oil corporations and caution the dwellers against unreasonable demands. Promote educational and economic opportunities for the creek dwellers

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