

## Crude Oil-Producing Communities and Conflicts in Akwa Ibom State (1995-2015)

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### Abstract

*This paper investigates the conflicts arising in crude oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, from 1995 to 2015, a period characterized by significant socio-economic and environmental challenges linked to oil extraction. The study examines the complex interplay between local communities, multinational oil companies, and government authorities, highlighting the adverse effects of oil exploration, including environmental degradation, economic disparities, and social unrest. Through a detailed analysis of specific case studies, the research identifies key drivers of conflict, such as inadequate compensation for environmental damages, lack of community engagement, and the rise of youth militancy as a response to perceived injustices. The findings reveal that while oil production has the potential to stimulate local development, it often results in significant disruptions of traditional livelihoods and community well-being. The paper further explores the responses from oil companies and government agencies, as*

*well as the roles of local and international advocacy groups in addressing community grievances. The methodology adopted in this study is gotten primarily from secondary sources. Ultimately, this study aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by crude oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State and to propose pathways for conflict resolution and sustainable development. By emphasizing the need for inclusive stakeholder engagement, accountability, and environmental stewardship, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in oil-rich regions and highlights the importance of equitable resource management for fostering peace and prosperity.*

**Keywords:** Crude Oil, Oil-Producing Communities, Conflicts, Akwa Ibom State

### **Introduction**

The discovery of crude oil in Nigeria has significantly altered the socio-economic landscape of the nation, making it a pivotal player in the global energy market. Akwa Ibom State, endowed with rich oil reserves, has been at the forefront of this transformation. However, the period from 1995 to 2015 was marked by escalating conflicts within crude oil-producing communities in the state, revealing a complex interplay between resource extraction, environmental degradation, and social unrest. While oil extraction has the potential to generate substantial revenue and improve local livelihoods, the reality has often been starkly different for communities living in proximity to oil facilities.

In Akwa Ibom State, the adverse effects of oil production such as land degradation, pollution, and destruction of aquatic ecosystems have had profound implications for traditional livelihoods, particularly fishing and farming. These environmental challenges, coupled with a lack of adequate compensation and infrastructural development, have fuelled widespread dissatisfaction among community members. Many residents feel marginalized in the decision-making processes that affect their land and resources, leading to tensions between local populations, multinational oil companies, and government authorities. George Frynas, in his book *Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation Between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, states that

*“The conflicts in Akwa Ibom between 1995 and 2015 are symptomatic of broader struggles between local communities and multinational oil corporations. Without accountability and equitable distribution of resources, these conflicts will persist, as communities demand redress for decades of environmental injustice”<sup>1</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> George Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: The Conflict and Litigation Between Oil Companies and Village Communities* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), p.8.

Moreover, the rise of youth militancy during this period represents a significant response to perceived injustices and neglect. Disillusioned by the socio-economic disparities and the environmental consequences of oil extraction, young people have formed various militia groups to voice their grievances, often resorting to violence as a means of drawing attention to their plight. This cycle of conflict has not only destabilized the region but has also hindered potential pathways to sustainable development.

This paper aims to critically analyze the factors contributing to conflicts in crude oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State between 1995 and 2015. By examining specific case studies, this research will explore the oil discovered and impacts in Akwa Ibom State, Akwa Ibom's role in Nigeria's oil sector, notable incidents that occurred during conflicts in crude oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State, underlying causes and consequences of these conflicts, and the responses from oil companies and government bodies. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide insights into the complexities of resource management in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Oil Discovery and its Impact in Akwa Ibom State**

Oil exploration in Nigeria began in the early 20th century, with the first discovery occurring in the Niger Delta region. In the 1930s, foreign oil companies, such as Shell D'Arcy (now Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria), acquired licenses to explore Nigeria's oil potential. By the 1950s, exploration activities intensified, leading to Nigeria's first commercial oil discovery in Oloibiri, in present-day Bayelsa State, in 1956<sup>2</sup>. This discovery marked a turning point, sparking extensive exploration across the Niger Delta, including what is today Akwa Ibom State.

In Akwa Ibom, exploration activities picked up in the 1970s and 1980s as multinational corporations expanded their operations to include offshore and onshore fields<sup>3</sup>. The state quickly emerged as one of Nigeria's most promising regions for oil production due to its coastal access and abundant reserves. Early exploration was driven by foreign capital, technology, and expertise, which laid the foundation for Akwa Ibom's prominence in Nigeria's oil industry. However, despite this development, local involvement in the sector remained limited, as policies primarily favored federal control and foreign investments, sidelining local populations in decision-making processes.

The discovery and exploitation of oil in Akwa Ibom State had a transformative effect on the region's economy, society, and environment. Oil production became the primary economic activity, with significant contributions to Nigeria's Gross Domestic

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Omeje, *Niger Delta: The State and the Oil Communities in Nigeria* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006) pp. 98 – 100.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Watts, *The Politics of Oil and Environmental Discourse in the Niger Delta* (California: University of California Press, 2008), p. 416.

Product (GDP) and foreign exchange earnings. Akwa Ibom alone contributes around 31% of Nigeria's total oil output, making it a crucial player in the national economy<sup>4</sup>.

However, this wealth generation has come with severe consequences for local communities. One of the most significant impacts has been environmental degradation. Frequent oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation have severely damaged the local ecosystem, disrupting agriculture and fishing, which were once the main livelihoods of the people in Akwa Ibom. Pollution of water bodies has further endangered food security and public health, with the oil activities introducing toxins that affect the soil, water, and air quality. Furthermore, oil wealth has led to economic disparities, where the profits generated have often benefited foreign corporations and the Nigerian federal government, while local communities receive minimal compensation. This economic marginalization, coupled with environmental damage, has fuelled resentment and a sense of neglect among the people of Akwa Ibom. Michael Watts opines that

*“The Niger Delta has become emblematic of the oil curse, where communities surrounded by vast wealth are submerged in poverty, insecurity, and environmental degradation. In places like Akwa Ibom, the struggle over resources has led to cycles of violence, as communities resist both corporate neglect and state indifference”.*<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, the discovery of oil has had a dual impact: it has brought significant revenue and development to the Nigerian economy while creating social and environmental issues within Akwa Ibom's oil-bearing communities.

### **Akwa Ibom's Role in Nigeria's Oil Sector**

Akwa Ibom is a vital component of Nigeria's oil sector. Located along the Atlantic coastline with access to extensive offshore oil fields. The state has emerged as one of the largest oil-producing states in Nigeria. By the 1990s and early 2000s, Akwa Ibom's oil production capacity had surpassed many other states, establishing it as a leading contributor to the nation's oil revenues. This status has granted the state some leverage in federal accounts, as the revenue-sharing formula recognizes oil-producing states with additional allocations based on their contribution to national oil output.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its significant contributions, Akwa Ibom faces challenges typical of the resource curse. The federal government retains central control over oil revenues,

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<sup>4</sup> Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad, (eds) *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence* (London: Zed Books, 2011), p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Watts, *Petro-Violence: Community Conflict and Corporate Complicity in Nigeria's Oil-Producing Region* (California: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 2001), p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Emeka Duruigbo, *Corporate Social Responsibility and the Oil Industry in the Niger Delta: Solution or Part of the Problem?* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 192.

redistributing them to states, often with insufficient accountability to the needs of local communities. Akwa Ibom's strategic role has also attracted multinational oil corporations, particularly ExxonMobil, Shell Petroleum, etc., whose operations significantly impact the local economy and environment. However, these corporations have often been criticized for inadequate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices, insufficient engagement with local communities, and their contributions to environmental degradation<sup>7</sup>.

Akwa Ibom's role in the oil sector has thus positioned it as both a beneficiary of national revenue sharing and a locus of socioeconomic and environmental challenges. While oil wealth contributes to state development, much of the local population experiences this development only indirectly, facing the consequences of extraction without equitable access to its benefits. Consequently, Akwa Ibom's position in Nigeria's oil sector highlights the paradox of resource-rich regions suffering from poverty and neglect, an issue that has contributed to prolonged tensions and conflicts in oil-bearing communities<sup>8</sup>.

### **Crude Oil-Producing Communities and Conflicts in Ibeno, Mbo, and Oron Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State, 1995 – 2015**

Between 1995 and 2015, the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Ibeno, Mbo, and Oron in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, faced intense social, economic, and environmental challenges due to crude oil exploration and production. These communities, rich in oil reserves, experienced severe conflicts linked to the activities of multinational oil corporations. The issues arising in these areas were often symptomatic of the wider crises in the Niger Delta, where oil wealth has been both a source of revenue and a cause of long-standing socio-economic and environmental distress. These case studies highlight the main conflicts and challenges faced by Ibeno, Mbo, and Oron LGAs during this period, exploring specific examples and instances to illustrate the factors that fuelled conflict and shaped community responses.

Ibeno, Mbo, and Oron LGAs are located along the coast of Akwa Ibom State in the Niger Delta region, which accounts for most of the Nigeria's oil production. The discovery of oil in this area transformed the local economy, as fishing and farming were increasingly overshadowed by oil extraction. These communities became hosts to major oil installations, with ExxonMobil, Total Petroleum Nigerian Limited (TPNL), Addax Petroleum, etc. being the prominent operators in the region<sup>9</sup>. Paul Francis et al. are of the

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<sup>7</sup> J. A. Omotola, "Oil and Conflicts in Nigeria: The Case of the Niger Delta". *African Security Studies*, Vol. 18, No.1 (2009), pp. 29-35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-42.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Essien, "Environmental Conflict and Social Unrest in Akwa Ibom's Oil-Bearing Communities". *Journal of Peace and Development Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2015), pp. 45 – 53.

opinion that "environmental damage... in communities like Ibeno and Oron has led to a deep sense of betrayal..."<sup>10</sup> Despite the wealth generated from these resources, these communities saw minimal direct benefits, with poor infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, and severe environmental degradation taking precedence instead. This contrast between wealth and deprivation set the stage for the conflicts that occurred between 1995 and 2015.

### **Notable Incidents that Occurred During Conflicts in Crude Oil-Producing Communities of Akwa Ibom State, 1995 – 2015.**

**Ibeno oil spill of 2012:** A significant oil spill from ExxonMobil's offshore facility contaminated the coastline of Ibeno, affecting fishing and destroying marine ecosystems<sup>11</sup>. The spill led to widespread protests by local fishermen, who demanded compensation for their lost income and environmental rehabilitation. The incident highlighted the impact of environmental degradation on local livelihoods and intensified resentment toward oil companies operating in the region.

**Youth protests in Oron in 2006:** In response to high unemployment and limited benefits from oil production, youth groups in Oron organized protests demanding jobs and infrastructure development<sup>12</sup>. The protests turned violent, leading to clashes with security forces. These protests underscored the frustration felt by the youth over the lack of economic opportunities, which fuelled further restiveness in the community.

**Disputes over compensation in Mbo (2010-2013):** Conflicts over compensation for land and environmental damage led to disputes among clans within Mbo LGA. The absence of a transparent system for distributing compensation funds created tensions within the community, leading to occasional clashes and disruptions<sup>13</sup>. These internal conflicts weakened community cohesion and highlighted the need for fair and transparent compensation mechanisms.

### **Key Drivers of Conflicts in Crude Oil-Producing Communities in Akwa Ibom State, 1995 – 2015**

The conflicts associated with crude oil-producing communities in Akwa Ibom State between 1995 and 2015 have roots in a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Francis, Deirdre Lapin, and Paula Rossiasco, *Securing Development and Peace in the Niger Delta* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011), p. 110.

<sup>11</sup> Nyieda P. Ebong, "Oil Exploration and Security Challenges in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria". *IOSR Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology, and Food Technology*, Vol. 10, No. 1(2016), pp. 24-26.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

environmental issues. Akwa Ibom, a significant oil-producing state in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, is home to several communities such as Mbo, Oron, and Ibena that have been directly impacted by oil exploration and production. This background provides a detailed context for these conflicts, exploring how historical factors, environmental degradation, economic disparities, political tensions, and community grievances fuelled widespread unrest.

**Environmental degradation and livelihood disruption:** Oil exploration and production have caused extensive environmental damage in Akwa Ibom, particularly in communities directly impacted by oil extraction activities. Mbo, Oron, and Ibena LGAs, known for their rich biodiversity, agriculture, and fishing, have faced severe environmental consequences due to oil spills, gas flaring, and pollution of water bodies. Frequent oil spills from broken pipelines and offshore rigs contaminated local water bodies, mangroves, and farmlands. For instance, in Ibena LGA, oil spills from ExxonMobil's Qua Iboe Terminal frequently destroyed marine habitats and polluted rivers, which are crucial for the local economy. Fishing, one of the primary occupations, was devastated, leading to economic hardship for thousands of families<sup>14</sup>. These oil spills, both minor and major, left long-lasting impacts on soil quality and water sources, rendering them unfit for farming and fishing for years.

Gas flaring, the process of burning off excess gas from oil extraction, has been a contentious issue in Akwa Ibom. Communities in Mbo and Ibena LGAs faced continuous exposure to toxic chemicals from gas flaring, which impacted air quality and caused health issues such as respiratory infections and skin conditions<sup>15</sup>. Gas flaring also led to acid rain, which degraded the soil and affected agricultural productivity, further diminishing livelihoods in these areas. Oil-related pollution degraded the region's biodiversity, affecting aquatic life, mangrove forests, and wildlife populations. The destruction of the mangroves and other vegetation reduced the natural buffer that protects coastal communities from flooding and erosion, leaving communities more vulnerable to environmental hazards.

**Economic marginalization and poverty:** Despite being a source of wealth for the state and the nation, oil-bearing communities in Akwa Ibom, especially Mbo, Oron, and Ibena, remained among the poorest. The perceived lack of benefits from oil production contributed significantly to conflicts. The local communities often saw little economic benefit from the wealth generated by oil. Oil companies preferred to hire skilled labor from

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<sup>14</sup> Emeka Okafor, "The Politics of Oil in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region: Environmental Degradation, Resistance and Peace Building". *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (2016), pp. 1-5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7-9.

outside the region, leading to high unemployment among local youth<sup>16</sup>. The absence of alternative economic opportunities meant that many residents had to rely on subsistence agriculture and fishing, both of which were increasingly unviable due to pollution and environmental degradation.

In addition, compensation for environmental damage and loss of livelihood was often inadequate or inconsistently delivered. In some cases, oil companies provided compensation to select individuals or groups, leading to conflicts within communities over the allocation of these payments. Furthermore, infrastructure development in the oil-producing communities was minimal, with few investments in roads, schools, healthcare facilities, and clean water sources. As a result, communities continued to struggle with inadequate public services, which heightened feelings of neglect and exclusion<sup>17</sup>.

**Revenue distribution and the Derivation Principle:** The 13% Derivation Principle, which allocates a portion of oil revenues to oil-producing states, was implemented in the 2000s to address the Niger Delta's grievances<sup>18</sup>. However, local communities in Akwa Ibom believed that the funds did not sufficiently benefit them. Many residents felt that revenue meant for development was misappropriated by local politicians, who diverted funds for personal gain. This perception of corruption further fueled resentment against both the government and oil companies.

Furthermore, dissatisfaction with the derivation formula led to calls for greater control over local resources. Community leaders and youth groups demanded direct access to the revenues generated by oil to ensure more equitable distribution. The inability of the government to implement a system that provided local benefits directly to the impacted communities intensified calls for resource control, which became a rallying point for regional advocacy<sup>19</sup>.

**Political and corporate neglect:** Many communities felt that both the government and oil companies had neglected their social and economic needs. This sense of abandonment led to a breakdown in trust and strained relationships between the communities and external entities. Also, oil companies operating in Akwa Ibom were expected to invest in social projects as part of their corporate social responsibility. However, many Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects either did not materialize or were insufficient to address the

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<sup>16</sup> Smith Onakuse and Chowwen, "The Socio-Economic Impact of Oil Exploitation on the Host Communities in the Niger Delta: A case of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria". *Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2016), pp. 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6-10.

<sup>18</sup> N. S. Akpan and E. M. Akpabio, "Oil and Conflicts in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria: Facing the Facts". *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, Vol. 24, No.1 (2009), p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Jide Ibieta and Osita Agbu, *The Stubborn Tragedy* (NOU): National Open University press, (2016), p. 200.

communities' needs<sup>20</sup>. In Ibeno, ExxonMobil's failure to deliver promised projects such as roads, health clinics, and schools led to protests, as community members saw this as evidence of the company's lack of commitment to their welfare<sup>21</sup>. In addition, local and federal governments were perceived as ineffective in addressing grievances. While the government made occasional efforts to mediate conflicts and negotiate with communities, these efforts were often sporadic and lacked the necessary changes.

Lastly, the lack of economic opportunities and environmental degradation drove many youths into militancy and activism. Groups of young people formed to demand jobs, compensation, and better living conditions, often resorting to protests and, in some cases, vandalism of oil infrastructure. Between 1998 and 2010, youth groups emerged in Mbo, Oron, and Ibeno LGAs, organized around the demands for economic justice and environmental protection<sup>22</sup>. These groups conducted protests both the government and oil companies, sometimes leading to violent confrontations. In 2006, for instance, protests by Oron youths demanding more job opportunities from oil companies led to clashes with police forces<sup>23</sup>. Such incidents often led to temporary disruptions in oil production and increased security presence in the region.

Compensation and benefits provided by oil companies sometimes led to internal conflicts within communities. Disputes over land ownership, who should be compensated, and how funds should be allocated were common in the oil-bearing communities. In Mbo, these disputes led to tensions between neighboring clans and sometimes escalated into violent clashes, further destabilizing the region<sup>24</sup>.

### **Consequences of Conflicts in Crude Oil-Producing Communities in Akwa Ibom State, 1995 – 2015**

**Social unrest and protests:** Frustration with oil companies and the government led to a series of protests and social unrest, particularly among the youth. In 2006, a large protest took place in Oron, where youths demanded employment opportunities and compensation for environmental damage<sup>25</sup>. These demonstrations disrupted oil operations and led to confrontations with law enforcement, sometimes resulting in arrests and casualties.

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Ugochukwu Ukeje, *Oil Capital, Ethnic Nationalism and Civil Conflicts in the Niger Delta of Nigeria* (Dakar: CODESRIA Books, 2023), p. 230.

<sup>21</sup> Judith Burdin Asuni, *Blood Oil in the Niger Delta* (Washington D. C: U. S. Institute of Peace, 2009), pp. 108-110.

<sup>22</sup> U. Ikeineme, "Oil and the Politics of Resource Control in Nigeria: The Case of the Niger Delta". *African Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 9, No.1 (2004), pp. 45-63.

<sup>23</sup> U. E. Ite, "Sustainable Development and the Oil Industry in Nigeria: A Case Study of Akwa Ibom State". *Environmental Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2004), pp. 319-310.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311-320.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321-325.

Conflicts also arose within communities over oil revenue allocations. In Mbo, disputes erupted between clans over which groups had legitimate rights to compensation from oil companies. These inter-clan disputes occasionally turned violent, affecting community cohesion<sup>26</sup>.

**Violent clashes and insecurity:** Tensions in the oil-producing areas of Akwa Ibom often escalated into violence, sometimes involving local militant groups and security forces. In Ibeno, militant groups emerged in response to the marginalization of local communities. These groups sabotaged oil facilities and pipelines to pressure companies into addressing community demands. In 2010, militants attacked 126 lines in the area, temporarily halting oil production and leading to significant economic losses<sup>27</sup>. In addition, high unemployment and limited opportunities contributed to a rise in criminal activities, such as oil bunkering (illegal tapping of pipelines) and kidnapping. Criminal groups capitalized on the instability, creating further insecurity in the area.

**Economic consequences:** The conflicts had severe economic implications for both the communities and the state. Oil companies suffered financial losses due to disrupted production, while communities faced worsened economic conditions. As a result of the persistent insecurity, investment in other sectors in these oil-producing communities was limited, and economic development slowed. Farmers and fishermen, whose livelihoods were directly affected by environmental degradation, suffered economically, with little or no support for alternative income sources. Insecurity discouraged infrastructure projects in the region, as potential investors and contractors were deterred by the risk of violence and theft<sup>28</sup>. This left communities without the necessary infrastructure, further reinforcing the cycle of poverty.

**Environmental and health impacts:** Continuous oil spills and gas flaring had a long-lasting impact on the health of residents and the local environment. Communities in Ibeno, Oron, and Mbo reported high incidences of respiratory diseases, skin infections, and other health problems due to pollution from oil spills and gas flaring. In Ibeno, studies have shown increased cases of respiratory illness linked to prolonged exposure to toxic fumes from gas flaring<sup>29</sup>. Also, the natural environment in these communities suffered greatly, with water bodies polluted and biodiversity significantly reduced. This environmental

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<sup>26</sup> S. Akan, "The Environmental and Social Impacts of Oil Exploration in Akwa Ibom State" *Journal of Environmental Management*, Vol. 95 (July 2012), pp. 222-210.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-220.

<sup>28</sup> S. Akan, "The Environmental and Social Impacts of Oil Exploration in Akwa Ibom State" *Journal of Environmental Management...*, pp. 221-225.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 226-230.

degradation had long-term consequences, including reduced fish populations, which affected the local fishing industry<sup>30</sup>.

**Displacement and loss of cultural heritage:** Some residents were forced to relocate due to pollution, insecurity, and declining economic opportunities, leading to a loss of cultural heritage and community cohesion. In Ibeno and parts of Mbo, prolonged environmental pollution rendered some areas uninhabitable, forcing families to relocate to less polluted areas<sup>31</sup>. This displacement disrupted family structures, weakened social ties, and led to a gradual loss of cultural practices unique to the communities. Fishing and farming, traditionally the primary occupations in these areas, became unviable due to environmental degradation. This loss of traditional livelihoods led to a generational shift away from cultural practices and traditional knowledge related to the land and sea.

### **Responses from Government and Oil Companies**

The Nigerian government and oil companies, particularly ExxonMobil, attempted various strategies to address the conflicts in these LGAs. However, these responses often fell short of addressing the root causes of discontent.

First, increased security presence. To protect oil installations, the Nigerian government deployed military forces to these communities. This response often escalated tensions, as the military's presence led to reports of harassment, forced displacement, and violent clashes with residents. In Mbo, for instance, military personnel allegedly used force against locals during a protest, which only intensified the resentment against both the government and oil companies<sup>32</sup>.

Second, ExxonMobil, Universal Energy, Shell Petroleum, and other oil companies implemented Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects as a means of giving back to the communities<sup>33</sup>. These included scholarships, vocational training, and some healthcare initiatives. However, these CSR efforts were often criticized as inadequate, with locals arguing that they did not compensate for the environmental damage and economic losses. In Ibeno, for example, ExxonMobil awarded scholarships to students, but community leaders argued that this was only a small benefit compared to the damage from oil spills<sup>34</sup>.

Third, in 2009, the Nigerian government introduced an amnesty program for Niger Delta militants, offering disarmament, training, and monthly stipends<sup>35</sup>. While some youth

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<sup>30</sup> Andrew Rowell, James Marriott and Lorne Stockman, *The Next Gulf: London, Washington and Oil Conflict in Nigeria* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2005), p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Essien, "Environmental Conflict and Social Unrest in Akwa Ibom's Oil-Bearing Communities" *Journal of Peace and Development studies...*, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> David Udofia, "Peacebuilding Mechanisms in Akwa Ibom State Oil-Bearing Communities in Nigeria". *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*, Vol.1, No. 2 (2011), pp. 104-105.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-110.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-115.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

in Ibeno, Mbo, and Oron participated in this program, it did not address the underlying grievances related to environmental degradation, economic exclusion, and poor infrastructure. Many former militants expressed dissatisfaction, viewing the amnesty as a temporary measure that did not result in meaningful development for their communities<sup>36</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

The examination of crude oil-producing communities and the conflicts in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, from 1995 to 2015 reveals a complex tapestry of environmental, socio-economic, and political dynamics. The discovery and exploitation of oil resources, while economically significant for the nation, have led to profound challenges for local communities. The adverse impacts of environmental degradation, inadequate compensation for oil-related damages, and a perceived lack of genuine engagement from oil companies have fuelled discontent and unrest among residents.

As this paper has illustrated, the consequences of these conflicts are multifaceted, affecting not only the livelihoods and health of local populations but also contributing to broader regional instability. The rise of youth militancy as a response to perceived injustices highlights the urgent need for a more inclusive and responsive approach to resource management. While there have been efforts by local communities, civil society organizations, and advocacy groups to address these grievances, the path to resolution remains fraught with challenges. Effective conflict resolution requires a commitment to transparency, accountability, and genuine dialogue among all stakeholders, including the government, oil companies, and community members.

Ultimately, for Akwa Ibom State to achieve sustainable development, it is imperative to prioritize the voices and needs of the communities directly impacted by oil extraction. This includes implementing robust policies that ensure fair resource distribution, environmental protection, and economic diversification. Only through collaborative and proactive measures can the cycle of conflict be broken, paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all stakeholders involved. The lessons learned from this period serve as critical insights for other regions grappling with similar challenges in the management of natural resources.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

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