Chapter 10
Environmental Security Threats and Policy Response in the Niger Delta, Nigeria 1990–2016

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, environmental security in the coastal Niger Delta has had a growing scholarly interest from divergent perspectives seeking for broader elucidation and understanding of State policy response. These security threats notably oil spill, water and land pollution, gas flaring, acid rain, mangrove deforestation, etc are linked to the Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs)and oil resource exploitation. These have been perverse, resulting in ecological breakdown, vulnerability, emergency and environmental insecurity challenges since at least the 1970s when oil in the region became the main stay of Nigeria's economy. This conceptual paper builds on the political ecology framework which discusses the impact of global power asymmetry on natural resource extraction and extensive body of work in the broad field of environmental security to explore salient indicators which demonstrate the evidence of environmental insecurity threats and poor State policy response and made some recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

The environment perhaps has been a neglected component of the security debate as security was initially conceived largely as a military affair with emphasis on protecting the territorial integrity of the State against nuclear warfare (Deudney, 1990). This pointed to the debate on redefining security beyond its narrow militaristic scope. Brown (1977) reopened the debate on "redefining national security" from energy and ecological perspectives. Ullman (1983) further advanced this debate within the environmental context. Perhaps the debate did not gain much scholarly attention till approximately the end of the Cold War in 1989.

Remarkable fluidity and openness had emerged in security studies since the end of the Cold War. The non-military security threats persisted, resulting in scholarly re-engagement with debates on "redefining security" as new wars and local conflicts persisted in the global South (Kaldor, 1999). This took divergent dimensions including environmental concerns (Mathews, 1989; Myers, 1989; Klare, 1996;Paris, 2001). The Copenhagen school of security studies provided a new security framework within the "security securitization" thesis aimed at sectorial security analysis including societal, economic, environmental, etc. (Buzan et al., 1997).

The persistent ecological threats including environmental degradation saw the emergence of the field of environmental security (ES) as a distinct field of enquiry. Thus, ES studies aim to examine some of the foundational questions of ecological concern, including anthropogenic such as climate change and global warming and non-anthropogenic issues including deleterious environmental resource extraction and its effects on both the ecology and human being. In particular, human- centric perspectives on environmental security provides plausible linkages between the environment and human survival (Dalby, 2013).

To define ES requires an exploration of the interaction of humans and the natural environment, including the causes and effects of environmental degradation and vulnerabilities. Hence, ES integrates a number of issues such as climate change, emergency management, the impact of policies and human interaction with nature including ecological factors etc. and how policies or remediation strategies are deployed to cope or withstand the threats. Thus, environmental security could be defined as absence of threats such as risks or hazards.

The question of environmental policy response in this chapter aims to draw attention to the coastal Niger Delta region noted for historic struggles against environmental degradation, resource marginalization and persistent environmental pollution since at least the 1970s when crude oil became the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. Although there have been several environmental policies in Nigeria since the discovery of oil in 1956. A number of evidence point out the prevalence of environmental security threats in the region such as oil spill, gas flaring, acid rain, land and water pollution, mangrove deforestation, black soot etc. These have become intense to the extent of threatening the livelihoods and the very existence of the people (Amadi, 2013).

Against the background of these problems, the central objective of this chapter is to provide evidence of these environmental security threats in the Niger Delta and how they have negatively impacted the region and the need for policy response. Although it is argued that environmental degradation arising from crude oil extraction by MNOCs and social injustice is expressed through youth restiveness including vandalization of oil equipment, militancy and taking of oil workers into hostage, this chapter suggests that this might leave these problems unresolved as policy dialogue is always a preferred strategy to resolving such problems.

BACKGROUND

Environmental security(ES) could be seen from a number of perspectives which include the absence of ecological threats which taint the environment and has adverse effects on humans(Dalby,2002;Chelecki,2002) or the ability to withstand resource scarcity, threats or shock. Deudney (1990) re-inscribed the need for delineation of what constitutes national security threats. He contends that "national security from violence and environmental habitability have little in common. The rising fashion of linking the

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