



CLIMATE CHANGE, GLOBAL ENERGY TRANSITION AND THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract:

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has not benefitted commensurately from its oil abundance, yet it has suffered some of the worst social, economic and environmental impacts of these activities in the world. This is put in clearer perspective within the context of the global energy transition that is being developed as a corrective path to global warming, the main driver of climate change. This paper argues that with the Nigerian state's poor handling of the resource control and environmental justice demand of the Niger Delta, the region is not in the best stead for the emerging era. Based on the theory of political ecology, the paper posits further that the Nigerian state through the combination legislative land dispossession, state repression, political domination and economic irresponsibility underdeveloped the Niger Delta. Thus, the reality in the region as the world gravitates towards the post-carbon stands global best practices in handling the development of oil and gas hubs on its head, as it has had several missed opportunities for development. The recommends that environmental justice, which is a complex of several ameliorative steps is the only way forward to develop the Niger Delta and prepare it for global energy transition.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria effectively became an oil-producing nation in 1956 when oil was discovered in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta region of the country. Since the discovery of oil, the country's political economy has radically changed over the years from a well-diversified economy to an oil-dependent one, bedevilled by the dynamics of the resource curse. The country is one of the leading producers of oil, being the world's sixteenth-largest and Africa's leading producer of crude oil^{1, 2}. The country's oil and gas reserves stand at 37 billion barrels and 209.26 trillion cubic feet (TCF) as of 2024, according to the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC)³. Thus, the Niger Delta is arguably the most strategic region of Nigeria, being its main source of oil production and accruable earnings. Thus, it is impossible to imagine the Nigerian economy without the recognizing the Niger Delta region as a critical factor.

The quest to address the main driver of climate change, global warming has occupied the attention of global leaders and stakeholders for a long time. Global climate leaders and stakeholders reckon that there is an urgent need to reduce global warming to environmentally bearable degrees to address climate change. The global energy transition discourse has since then been on the need to stop the exploration, exploitation and distribution of hydrocarbons, which are the leading source of emissions into the atmosphere⁴. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) notes that the world requires cutting carbon dioxide (CO₂)

¹ Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission "Nigeria: Leading Crude Oil Producer in Africa" (NUPRC, 25 July 2024) <https://www.nuprc.gov.ng/nigeria-leading-crude-oil-producer-in-africa/> accessed 22 April 2025.

²J William Carpenter, "The Main Oil Producing countries in Africa" (Investopedia, 25 November 2025) <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/101515/biggest-oil-producers-africa.asp> accessed 22 April 2025

³ Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission "Nigeria's Oil and Gas Reserves Soar: NUPRC Unveils Impressive Figures" (NUPRC, 16 April 2024) <https://www.nuprc.gov.ng/nigerias-oil-and-gas-reserves-soar-nuprc-unveils-impressive-figures/#:~:text=The%20latest%20figures%20on%20Nigeria's,decisions%2C%20and%20overall%20economic%20planning.> accessed 22 April 2025.

⁴ Manfred Hafner and Simone Tagliapietra, "The Global Energy Transition: A Review of the Existing Literature". In: Manfred Hafner and Simeone Tagliapietra (eds) (2020) 73 *The Geopolitics of the Global Energy Transition. Lecture Notes in Energy* (Springer, Cham.) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39066-2_1 accessed 22 April 2025.

emissions by around 37 gigatonnes (gt) between 2022 and 2050 to limit global warming to 1.5°C, thereby reaching net-zero emissions by this deadline⁵. This global agenda came into sharp focus as the agenda for the cessation of hydrocarbons ensured that the rather eventful COP 28 of 2023 came to a controversial end⁶. However, one thing is certain: the controversy has started a more determined focus on global energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables.

This brings the possible future reality of Nigeria's economy and development into focus, with the Niger Delta hallmarking the whole of this. The region has been the economic mainstay of the Nigerian state, as successive governments rely on oil rents from the region to run the country. Osaghae notes that the nature and character of Nigeria's political economy have largely been shaped by oil⁷. Niger Delta oil remains the most topical and controversial issue in Nigeria's political economy. It also elicits serious tensions in national economic discourse, such as at National Constitutional Conferences or any gathering that speaks to the economy of the country. Hence, it is apposite the Niger Delta arguably Nigeria's most consequential region. The fact that the majority of Nigeria's revenue, standing at 80% in 2024, registers the centrality of the region to the country's economy⁸.

Despite the region's centrality to economic wellbeing, it is a largely underdeveloped region in Nigeria⁹. Oil proceeds have, over the years, been used to run the country and ingratiate political elites across the country's ethnic nationalities. However, oil abundance has caused wanton social, economic and environmental crises in the Niger Delta

⁵ IRENA, "World Energy Transition Outlook 2024: The 1.5°C Pathway" (Abu Dhabi, International Renewable Energy Agency, 2024) https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2024/Nov/IRENA_World_energy_transition_s_outlook_2024.pdf accessed 22 April 2025

⁶ (S&P Global, "What is energy transition" (S&P Global, 2020) <https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/market-insights/what-is-energy-transition> accessed 21 April 2025

⁷ Eghosa Osaghae (1998) *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (1st edn, Indiana University Press).

⁸ Government of Canada "Oil and Gas Market in Nigeria (Trade Commissioner Service, 2024) <https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/nigeria/market-reports-etudes-de-marches/0007653.aspx?lang=eng> accessed 21 April 2025.

⁹ Adelaja Odukoya, "Oil and sustainable development in Nigeria: A case of study the Niger Delta" (2006) 20 *Journal of Human Ecology* 249.

instead of development. Therefore, rather than being a Nigerian and African example of deploying resource endowment for development, Niger Delta retrogressively manifested environmental damage, economic deprivation and marginalisation, youth unemployment, restiveness and militancy, disruption of the indigenous economy, insecurity and poor governance, among others. The situation becomes murkier when the new but mounting impacts of climate change, such as coastal erosions and inundations, land degradation and sea level rise, among others, are added to it¹⁰. Thus, the Niger Delta has become the exact opposite of what it should be, despite being region from where Nigeria draws the greatest part of its revenue.

The imminent global energy transition and the reduction or outright cessation of hydrocarbons put the Nigeria and the Niger Delta in potential precarious situation. This is because Nigeria failed to optimally deploy oil proceeds to develop the country and the Niger Delta region in particular. The global agenda is gathering momentum, and countries around the world, including oil-producing ones, have started to adjust their political economy to cope with the imminence of the end of oil¹¹. Even the Nigerian state recognises this reality as it has keyed into the global energy transition agenda by adopting its National Energy Transition Plan (ETP) in 2021, pledging to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060¹². Global pressures are mounting through the instrumentalities of global climate diplomacy to ensure a quicker achievement of net-zero because of the worsening impacts of global warming and climate change despite resistance and complex negotiations on the modalities of the transitions by multilateral actors. The imminence of a post-carbon world has led many oil and gas companies to diversify into renewable energies and other portfolios to remain in business in the long run¹³.

¹⁰ Olajide, B. E., Quadri, M. O., & Ojakorotu, V. (2018). Climate Change, Human Security and Good Governance in Nigeria. *African Renaissance*, 15(3), 173-196.

¹¹ Simon Davidsson, "Global energy transitions Renewable energy technology and non-renewable resources (PhD Thesis, Uppsala University, Sweden, 2015) <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:791155/FULLTEXT01.pdf> accessed 22 2025.

¹² Sustainable Energy for All, "Nigeria Energy Transition Plan" (Seforall, 2025) <https://www.seforall.org/our-work/initiatives-projects/energy-transition-plans/nigeria> accessed 22 April 2025.

¹³ Ibid 5

The central argument of this paper is that despite the long decades of oil and gas extraction in Niger Delta, the Nigerian state failed to ensure the development of the region. Hence, given the imminence of the energy transition in the post-carbon era, its situation can be summed up as that of missed opportunities. This means that while oil and gas wealth from the Niger Delta has been used run the Nigerian state and developed other urban spaces around the country, it has not benefit commensurately in development terms. Therefore, the region is poised to enter the post-carbon era as an underdeveloped and insecure oil hub. This is because Nigeria's oil proceeds will drop and the region by implication will also lose revenue accruable from oil, including possible oil and gas companies' corporate social responsibility projects that are critical to the development of the Niger Delta. This situation is dissimilar to those of similar oil enclaves worldwide, especially those in developing countries such as North Africa, the Middle East and South America. For example, the United Arab Emirates used its accruals to develop its oil hubs from mere deserts to important global commercial hubs¹⁴. Countries that prioritised the development of their oil hubs are better positioned to act as important global economic hubs in the emerging era.

Given this, the paper is divided into six different sections. The first section is the introduction, the Overview of Climate Change and Global Energy Transition

and the second focus on Theoretical Framework while the third section discussed on Crude Oil and Gas Extraction in the Niger Delta Region in the Context of Climate Change. The fourth section extensively discussed the Nigerian State, Crude Oil Extraction and the Niger Delta Crisis. The fifth section explains the Climate Change and the Quest for Global Energy Transition: Missed Opportunities for the Niger Delta and the second to the last section discussed the Niger Delta in the Post-Carbon Era, its Recommendatory Policy/Legal Ameliorations as Way Forward, and the final section is the conclusion.

1.1 Overview of Climate Change and Global Energy Transition

¹⁴ Osman Antwi-Boateng and Noura Hamad Salim Al Jaber, 'The post-oil strategy of the UAE: An examination of diversification strategies and challenges' (2022) 50 *Politics & Policy* 380

The Brundtland Commission of 1987 served the dual purpose of confirming the anthropogenic driver of global warming, the arch instigator of climate change and the urgent need to address it. Since the deposition of the Commission's report to the United Nations, efforts have been made to address global warming and climate change. Despite these efforts, including but not limited to the development of the United Nations climate change response structure, climate change continues to get more serious and has become more destructive^{15, 16}. Essentially, climate change is the product of the observed environmental alterations over time on account of global warming. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) notes that "change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable periods"¹⁷. The defining character of climate change is hinged level of global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) notes that climate change is causing.

"Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. This has led to widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people (high confidence). Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected (high confidence)"¹⁸

¹⁵ Bamidele Olajide, 'An Evaluation of Subnational Climate Change Response in Lagos State, Nigeria and Kwazulu Natal Province, South Africa' (PhD Thesis, North West University, South Africa, 2022).

¹⁶ Bamidele Olajide 'Environmental Diplomacy and the Fallacy of Climate Bandwagoning in Africa'. In Samuel O. Oloruntoba and Toyin Falola (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Africa and the Changing Global Order* (Palgrave MacMillan 2022)

¹⁷ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, "Fact sheet: Climate change science - the status of climate change science today" (UNFCCC, 2011). https://unfccc.int/files/press/backgrounders/application/pdf/press_factsh_science.pdf Accessed 8 April 2020.

¹⁸ IPCC, "Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report: Summary for Policymakers" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023). https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf Accessed 22 April 2025.

This is because there is a direct link between the level of global warming and the severity of climate change and its impacts. The Niger Delta is already also being affected by these climate change impacts.

Therefore, to address climate change, climate change mitigation that aims to reduce emissions has become the leading topic in global environmental governance. Global energy transition is critical to climate change mitigation because it is about overhauling the production, distribution and consumption of energy in the world. The Paris Agreement is a pivotal in the development of the global energy transition agenda as it bindingly mandates countries in the world to limit global warming to between 2°C to 1.5°C above pre-industrial times¹⁹. With this, global climate and energy stakeholders have keyed into the agenda to shift the focus of the global energy process to cleaner and renewable energy sources such as hydro, wind and solar to power industries to power the different sectors of the global economy. According to Alagoz & Alghawi, fossil fuels have played critical roles in powering the global economy to modernity since the 1850s, but with serious environmental downsides, chiefly climate change arising from global warming²⁰. Hence, the global energy transition is an existential priority as fossil fuels account for 75% of total carbon emissions into the atmosphere²¹.

Global energy transition is a historical fact, as the world has experienced this at least twice. The world moved from wood to coal and from coal to oil²². This shows that the world has a historical quest for energy efficiency. With the world at the best of its technological advancement trajectory yet, the development of alternative energy so far has received tremendous technological impetus. Thus, the global energy transition

¹⁹ Satar Bakhsh and others, 'Strategy towards sustainable energy transition: The effect of environmental governance, economic complexity and geopolitics' (2024) 52 *Energy Strategy Reviews* 101330.

²⁰ Ekrem Alagoz and Yaser Alghawi "The energy transition: navigating the shift towards renewables in the oil and gas industry (2023) 12 *Journal of Energy and Natural Resources* 21.

²¹ UNDP Climate Promise, "What is sustainable energy transition and why it is key to tackling climate change?" (2025 3 February) <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-sustainable-energy-transition-and-why-it-key-tackling-climate-change> accessed 22 April 2025

²² Gabriel Collins and Michelle Michot Foss, "The Global Energy Transition's Looming Valley of Death." *Report* (Baker Institute, 2022).

aims to foster technological advancement towards decarbonisation, energy efficiency and energy security. The allure of harnessing less expensive sources of energy to power development across the world is also a major driver of the global energy transition. Significant efforts and investments are now being deployed by stakeholders to ensure that the emergence into the post-carbon era without delay to mitigate climate change and leverage the economic benefits of the global energy transition.

Some of the renewable energy innovations include the development of solar panels, electric vehicles and battery storage. These innovations are proving disruptive and revolutionary in the energy process. It also holds vast potential for economic opportunities, as it produced 12 million jobs in 2022. The transition is being affected by financial inadequacy as it requires an annual injection of USD 5 trillion to ramp up the transition towards achieving net-zero emissions by 2050²³. Therefore, the Nigeria and the Niger Delta are in a race against time as the world has begun transiting into a non-fossil fuel economy. This leaves the region in considerable socioeconomic uncertainty as its oil assets risk redundancy.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is theoretically anchored on the theory of political ecology. The theory casts a critical look at environmental issues and their dynamics by asserting that these issues are not merely ecological but eminently political²⁴. Political ecologists hold that there is a relationship between politics and ecology. They argue that there exists politics of ecology, which entails that ecological affordances, such as natural resources, their distribution, allocation and extraction, are critical to the formation and functioning of social and political institutions²⁵. This means that the ecology is central to the interpretation and understanding of the Eastonian stance on politics, which defines it as “the authoritative allocation of values”²⁶. It then portends that ecological values are central

²³ Ibid 5

²⁴ E-gyankosh, “Political Ecology” (n.d., Unit 9)

<https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/79098/1/Unit-9.pdf> accessed April 22 2025.

²⁵ David Easton "An approach to the analysis of political systems" (1957) 9 *World Politics* 383.

²⁶ Ibid 24

to the emergence of political and social institutions in society. The theory also holds that societal power structures provide answers to the Lasswellian poser of ‘who gets what, when and how?’, which means the determination of who controls and benefits from resources. This explains the vehemence of the theoretical position that ecology and its services are anything but apolitical.

The theory comes from areas of strange conceptual bedfellows in that politics and ecology are far apart in focus and research orientations. Robbins notes the eclectic nature of the theory and posits that despite emerging from different directions, their synthesis serves to answer the serious ecological and political issues society is grappling with²⁷. It emerged as a theoretical tradition in the 1960s and 1970s through the works of scholars, such as Dianne Rocheleau, Arturo Escobar, Richard Peet, Piers Blaikie, Bunyan Bryant, Eric Wolf and Johnston Barbara, among others²⁸. Arguing that the exploration, exploitation and benefiting from resources and their environmental downsides are unequally shared, political ecology holds the following assumptions²⁹;

1. Costs and benefits of environmental change are not distributed equally in that they manifest in ethnic, racial, class manners or other outlooks, such that different groups are affected differently.
2. Unequal environmental distributions either strengthen or reduce existing social inequalities. This is because it is amenable to change, as any change to the environment affects the existing social and economic structure.
3. Unequal distribution of costs and benefits and the reinforcement or reduction of pre-existing inequalities hold political implications in terms of altered power relations produced in society.

The foregoing explication of the theory of political ecology speaks to the situation of the Niger Delta region within the Nigerian state. It has

²⁷ Paul Robbins, “Political Ecology” (2012) *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (2nd edn UK: Wiley Blackwell).

²⁸ Ibid 24

²⁹ Ibid 24

benefited sparingly in development terms despite being the region where the economic mainstay of Nigeria comes from. The theory speaks to the power relations that exist between the Nigerian state and the region in terms of how oil resources and ecological problems are distributed, a situation that has firmed up the political and economic structure of the country. Afinotan and Ojajorotu speaking to this inequality in the costs and benefits of oil and gas exploration in the Niger Delta note that the situation of the region vis à vis oil is akin to internal repression and colonialism³⁰. To this extent, the theory is relevant to the discussion of the issues raised in this paper.

3.0 CRUDE OIL AND GAS EXTRACTION IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta in 1956 altered the political economy of Nigeria. Before Nigeria struck oil in the region, it was mainly an agricultural milieu, essentially one of the country's most important in that respect because of its large palm oil production. There region was well-known to be a leading palm oil producing area before the advent of the British colonialists³¹. This produce became the economic mainstay of the region as it was one of its leading producers at the time. Beyond palm oil, the people of the Niger Delta also produced sundry agricultural products and because of its massive wetland endowment, the traditionally engaged in riverine economic activities, including fishing³². Thus, Niger Delta's indigenous economy was thriving before the discovery oil and the region was one of the most prosperous in colonial and early independence Nigeria.

The discovery oil change the political economy of the Niger Delta beyond measure as the economic focus of Nigeria and the region changed into a single-resource economy. First, in line with the resource curse

³⁰ Lawrence A. Afinotan and Victor Ojajorotu, 'The Niger Delta crisis: Issues, challenges and prospects' (2009) 3 *African journal of political science and international relations* 191.

³¹ Chijioke Uwasomba and Victor S. Alumona, 'Militancy in the Niger Delta and the deepening crisis of the oil economy in Nigeria' (2013) 38 *Africa Development* 21.

³² , Sylvester Okotie, 'The Nigerian economy before the discovery of crude oil'. In Ndimele, P.E. (ed) *The political ecology of oil and gas activities in the Nigerian aquatic ecosystem* (Academic Press, 2018) 71.

thesis of reduced attention on other sectors of the economy, the Nigerian government concentrated on oil extraction to the destruction of the agricultural sector in the region and the rest of the country³³. It is within this context that the Niger Delta lost its leadership in the palm oil production and its supposed value chain in the event of developing the section in the future. Similarly, the creeping reliance on oil, which reached a crescendo during the military era, stifled regional economic development built around palm oil and other agricultural production in the region³⁴. Thus, it can be inferred that oil extraction in the Niger Delta weakened not just the region's indigenous economy but also its attempts at engendering economic development through agricultural industrialisation from within. This is because the three regions, Eastern, Mid-Western and Western, which the Niger Delta straddled in the First Republic demonstrated serious commitment to agricultural industrialisation³⁵. This development is arguably also the beginning of the region's high rate of youth unemployment.

Environmentally, oil and gas extraction has been a curse to the Niger Delta. This is because these activities have compromised the environmental integrity of the region, thereby destroying its biodiversity. The beckoning of oil extraction processes thrust the area into an environmental crisis because such activities led to destruction of vegetation, farmlands and human settlements as these activities altered the pristine environment enjoyed in the Niger Delta before the advent of oil and gas extraction³⁶. Following oil and gas prospecting in the region is the now historical oil spillage. Oil spillage is arguable the singular most destructive impact of oil extraction in the Niger Delta. International organisations, the civil society and other stakeholders have decried the spate of oil spillage and their environmental impacts in the region³⁷. According to Nnimmo Bassey, a leading environmental activist from the

³³ Elwerfelli Ali and James Benhin, 'Oil a Blessing or Curse: A Comparative Assessment of Nigeria, Norway and the United Arab Emirates' (2018) 8 *The Economic Letters* 1136.

³⁴ O. C. Asuk, 'Two Oils, Same Phenomena: Historicizing Exclusion, Poverty and Contemporary Violence in the Niger Delta' (2011) 5 *African Research Review* 1.

³⁵ *Ibid* 6

³⁶ *Ibid* 29

³⁷ Stakeholder Democracy Network, 'Ogoni Day 2017: Civil Society Organizations and Stakeholders Further Call For Cleanup of Ogoni Land' (Stakeholder Democracy Network, 11 January 2017) <https://sdn.ngo/ogoni-day-2017-civil-society-organizations-and-stakeholders-further-call-for-cleanup-of-ogoni-land/> accessed 23 April 2025.

region, between 9-13 million barrels of oil have been spilled in the Niger Delta between 1958 and 2010³⁸.

Many factors have been blamed for the unconscionably high rate of oil spillage in the Niger Delta. Afinotan and Ojajorotu note that blow-out, corrosion, equipment failure and pipeline vandalism are the leading causes of oil spillage in the region³⁹. The complicity of Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs) in this regard cannot be denied. Bassey opines further that they are the main culprits in oil spillage in Nigeria, with Shell, Eni (Agip), Chevron, Total and ExxonMobil accounting for 90% of recent oil spills in the region⁴⁰. This situation speaks to Regulatory failure by the government⁴¹. The inability of the Nigerian state to rein in the activities of the MNOCs and the lack of serious consequences for them allowed them to mindlessly engage in environmentally destructive behaviour for over 60 years.

Coupled with oil spillage is the continuous gas flaring in the region. Though this was banned by the government in 1979, it has continued unabatedly in the country⁴². According to the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), Nigeria flared 300.5 million standard cubic feet (mscf) of gas in 2024⁴³. This is despite the existence of legislation and commitments of the government to reduce gas flaring in the country. Notably, the 2024 gas flaring record was higher than those of the previous three years, with the 2020 record standing at 353.5 million scf of gas⁴⁴. This is contrary to its Nationally Determined Contributions commitment of an unconditional reduction of 20% and

³⁸ Abdulkareem Mojeed, "Stop playing politics with climate change: Q & A with Nnimmo Bassey" (Mongabay, 17 October 2023) <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/10/stop-playing-politics-with-climate-change-qa-with-nigerias-nnimmo-bassey/> accessed 23 April 2025.

³⁹ Ibid 29

⁴⁰ Ibid 39

⁴¹ Bulore Florence Ekeu-wei and Iguniwari Thomas Ekeu-wei. 'Crude Oil Spillage in the Niger Delta-Causes, Impact and Detection Approaches' (2024)

⁴² Elaine Ruth Fletcher, "The Niger Delta Harsh Lessons: Fossil Fuel's Harm to People and the Planet" (Health Policy Watch, 13 November 2022) <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/fossil-fuels-harms-health-as-well-as-the-planet/> accessed 22 April 2024.

⁴³ Abubakar Ibrahim, "Energy-starved Nigeria flares most gas in four years" (Business Day, Tracking Trends 29 April, 2025) <https://businessday.ng/energy/article/energy-starved-nigeria-flares-most-gas-in-four-years/> accessed 21 April, 2025.

⁴⁴ Ibid 44

stands the logic of the National Gas Policy, World Bank 2030 Zero Routine Flaring, the Global Methane Initiative, the Global Methane Pledge, and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition on its head⁴⁵. Hence, Nigeria cannot mitigate its gas flaring lust with its many global commitments and internal policies, leaving the Niger Delta in the throes of a worsening environmental reality.

The combination of oil extraction and gas flaring has compromised Niger Delta's environment. This has led to environmental problems such as land degradation, loss of biodiversity, destruction of life in water, leaving Africa's and the world's third-largest wetland in environmental crisis⁴⁶. With oil and gas problems such as pollution from oil spillage, corrosion of oil and gas pipeline infrastructure, poor management of oil spillage, and in recent decades, pipeline vandalism and crude oil theft, the people of Niger Delta have lost their indigenous economic activities such as farming and fishing, and associated activities⁴⁷.

The environmental situation has also caused massive food security problem in the Niger Delta. For a people who are primarily engaged in farming and fishing. This is because oil spills have degraded the land and rendered it unsuitable for farming, while water pollution kills fish or renders the fish poisonous for eating⁴⁸. Oil spills have reduced soil fertility, making land yield low-quality crops. Thus, the environmental situation in the Niger Delta does not support agriculture, ultimately leading to food security crisis in region. Also, environmental degradation has caused biodiversity loss, leading to the extinction of flora and fauna in the Niger Delta. There are also health implications of oil spills in the Niger Delta as they have been found to cause different types of cancers,

⁴⁵ Global Flaring and Methane Reduction Partnership, "Global Flaring and Methane Regulations, Case Study: Nigeria" (World Bank, December 2023) <https://flaringventingregulations.worldbank.org/nigeria> accessed 21 April 2025.

⁴⁶ Aransiola, Sesan Abiodun and others, 'Niger Delta mangrove ecosystem: Biodiversity, past and present pollution, threat and mitigation' (2024) 75 *Regional Studies in Marine Science* 103568.

⁴⁷ Temitayo Bello and Treasure Nwaeke, 'Impacts of oil exploration (oil and gas conflicts: Niger Delta as a case study)' (2023) 11 *Journal of Geoscience and Environment Protection*, 189.

⁴⁸ Gabriel Erhiga Odesa and oethrs, 'A holistic review of three-decade oil spillage across the Niger Delta Region, with emphasis on its impact on soil and water' (2024) 190 *World Sci. News* 119.

respiratory issues, skin problems and other diseases in the region⁴⁹. Thus, oil spills have led to preventable deaths of the people as they consume poisoned crops and fish products in the region.

The foregoing impacts of oil and gas extraction in Niger Delta have worsened in recent decades because of climate change. Given its nature as a threat multiplier, climate change has in recent decades exacerbated existing problems of oil spills and gas flaring in the Niger Delta⁵⁰. As the bastion of hydrocarbon emissions and pollution in the country, the impacts of climate change in the Niger Delta are some of the worst in the country. With the government's indifference to the environmental impacts of oil and gas extraction, the impacts on land, biodiversity, and the people are also worsening, while climate change is adding whole dangerous frequencies and higher intensity to these issues. Thus, the food security, health and the loss of natural habitats for flora and fauna, among others, are complemented by sea-level rise, constant flooding, coastal erosion and inundation. This has led to resource conflicts and displacement in the region in recent decades in the Niger Delta⁵¹. Hence, oil and gas extraction with the context of climate change does not bode well for the Niger because of lack of resilience to the impacts of the latter in region.

4.0 THE NIGERIAN STATE, CRUDE OIL EXTRACTION AND THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS

The discovery of oil and gas in 1956 changed state-civil society relations in the Niger Delta. While these relations were not as volatile as they had been in the past few decades, the foundations of state-society hostility in the region were laid in these early days. Given the minority status of the

⁴⁹ Orish Ebere Orisakwe, 'Crude oil and public health issues in Niger Delta, Nigeria: Much ado about the inevitable' (2021) 194 *Environmental research* 110725.

⁵⁰ Ibid 9

⁵¹ Freedom Onuoha, 'Climate change induced conflict in coastal communities of Nigeria's Niger Delta region and internal security operations: perspectives for the future' (2023, Accord Environment) <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/climate-change-induced-conflict-in-coastal-communities-of-nigerias-niger-delta-region-and-internal-security-operations-perspectives-for-the-future/#:~:text=It%20is%20predicted%20that%20a%200.2%2Dmeter%20rise,80%%20of%20its%20population%20to%20higher%20ground.&text=The%20clashes%20are%20common%20between%20pastoralists%20and%20farmers> accessed 21 April 2025

Niger Delta ethnicities, the fear of domination and dangerous social, economic and political reality on the region had always there. This was noted in the report of the Willinks Commission of 1958, but glossed over it with tokenistic recommendations to ‘allay’ the region’s fears⁵². These fears became real following the truncation of the First Republic in 1966 and the ensuing Civil War. Max Siollun noted that oil had been a factor in the proliferation of military governance in Nigeria in the post-Civil War era⁵³. Therefore, the Niger Delta became a region that the Nigerian state must dominate to continue to guarantee the flow of oil rents.

It is within the context of the foregoing that the Nigerian state’s response to the multidimensional damage of oil and gas extraction in Niger Delta finds expression. Anifowose⁵⁴ and Osaghae⁵⁵ alluded to the fact that the Niger Delta suffered and continues to bear the environmental and socioeconomic brunt of oil and gas activities in the region. Following continued oil spills in the region, the citizens of Niger Delta raised the necessary alarm to the grave consequence to their wellbeing, including the disruption of their indigenous economy and the poor environmental performance of the MNOCs. For example, Ogoniland in present-day Rivers State suffered one of the worst environmental degradations arising from oil spillage in the history of humankind⁵⁶. There were 2,976 oil spills in Ogoniland between 1976 and 1991⁵⁷. There has been no respite in this direction as there were 822 oil spills in the Niger Delta between 2020 and 2021⁵⁸. The irony of this situation, however, is that the Nigerian state paid lip service to ensuring the reduction or outright cessation of spills and other environmental damages accompanying oil and gas extraction in the Niger Delta.

⁵² John Ayoade, ‘Nigeria Positive Pessimism and Negative Optimism’ (Valedictory Lecture, University of Ibadan 2017)

⁵³ Max Siollun, (2009) ‘Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria’s Military Coup Culture’ (New York: Algora Publishing).

⁵⁴ Remi Anifowose, (2011) ‘Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Case Yoruba, Tiv and the Niger Delta’ (2nd edn)

⁵⁵ Ibid 6

⁵⁶ Kabari Sam, Nenibarini Zabbey and Amarachi Paschaline Onyena, ‘Implementing contaminated land remediation in Nigeria: insights from the Ogoni remediation project’ (2022) 115 *Land use policy* 106051.

⁵⁷ Ekpali Saint, ‘Timeline: Half a century of oil spills in Nigeria’s Ogoniland’ (Aljazeera, 21 December 2022) <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/12/21/timeline-oil-spills-in-nigerias-ogoniland> accessed April 20, 2023.

⁵⁸ Ibid 54

The Nigerian state have depended on continued centralization of oil and gas endowment and operation in the Niger Delta since the discovery of oil in the region. It firmed its grip on the region's oil wealth through this legislative gradualism and, based on this, accentuated the underdevelopment and crisis of the region. The Nigerian state dispossessed the people of Niger Delta of the land through legislations that brought oil production processes within total purview of the state. With legislations such as the Land Use Act of 1978, the Petroleum Act of 1969 (now amended as the Petroleum Industry Act of 2021), Minerals Act of 1946 (Amended as Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act of 2007), Oil Pipelines Act of 1956 (Amended in 1965), the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions, the Nigerian state granted and ossified the Federal Government's exclusive hold on oil and gas extraction in the Niger Delta. These legislations kept local communities out of oil and gas decision-making in the country and acted as tools for silencing their demands for resource control and environmental justice⁵⁹. Thirdly, the legislations have the combinedly favoured MNOCs in the Niger Delta relative the needs and demands of local communities⁶⁰. Hence, the legislations not only seized the land from Niger Delta communities, they also shut them out oil and gas resource management while bearing the environmental consequences of their extraction.

With more vociferous and vehement demands for resource control and environmental justice came a worsening spate of state repression and high-handed state response to these demands. This led to a high level of human rights abuse in the Niger Delta. The environmental reality of the Niger Delta in the wake of oil and gas extraction led to the rise of community associations and groups demanding environmental responsibility from government and the MNOCs. Some of these groups include the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Movement for the Survival of Izon Ethnic Minority in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND); and the Movement for Reparation to Ogbia (MORETO), among others⁶¹. Rather than acceding to the demands of these groups,

⁵⁹ Crosdel Emuedo and Michael Abam, 'Oil, land alienation and impoverishment in the Niger Delta, Nigeria' (2015) 3 *European journal of research in social sciences* 8.

⁶⁰ Brown Umukoro, 'Petroleum Host Communities and their rights to the environment in Nigeria: Shifting between economic interest and the right to clean environment' (2024) 14 *Revista Catalana de Dret Ambiental* 1

⁶¹ Ibid 6

the Nigerian state resorted to state repression and high-handedness, leading to a high number of human rights abuses⁶².

The forms of human rights abuse include extrajudicial killings and executions, such as the execution of the Ogoni 9, led by Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995⁶³. The Civil Liberty Organisation notes that there were 230 extrajudicial killings in the Niger Delta in 1990 alone. This is coupled with widespread detention, arbitrary arrests and torture. Earlier than this, the Nigerian state responded to Isaac Adaka Boro's Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and crushed it with maximum force in 1966. Such is the nature of the Nigeria's response to Niger Delta's demands⁶⁴. Oyewo notes that this development shaped the orientation of the people of the Niger Delta on the position and response of the state to their demands⁶⁵. There was also militarization of the Niger Delta, leading to the Nigerian military forces committing unconscionably high number of human rights abuses, including rape and arson⁶⁶. This grossly aggressive and high-handed response to Niger Delta resource control and environmental justice demands informs Osaghae's position that the Nigerian state would rather kill its citizens than accede to what it construes as 'unreasonable' demands to ensure the continued flow of oil rents from the MNOCs⁶⁷.

Another dimension to Niger Delta agitations is the perceived political domination and its ensuing marginalization in the country. As a collection of minority groups, the region was for so long relegated to the background in the political scheme of things in the country, especially during the military era. Agitations against political marginalisation can be gleaned from three basic positions or arguments. First, there is the sentiment that if the Niger Delta happens to be the region of one of the larger groups such as Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba, perhaps the outcome in

⁶² Ibid 53

⁶³ Ibid 6

⁶⁴ Chris O. Ikporukpo, 'From Adaka Boro to the Niger Delta Avengers: The dynamics and management of the revolt in Nigeria's Niger Delta' (2018) 43 *International Journal of African and Asian Studies* 35.

⁶⁵ Hussain Taofik Oyewo, 'The Political Ecology of Oil and Gas Activities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria' (2021) 1 *International Journal of Poverty, Investment and Development* 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid 6

⁶⁷ Ibid 6

terms of political marginalisation and even handling of issues of resource control and environmental justice would have been different. Secondly, there is also the sentiment that the political marginalisation of the Niger Delta was orchestrated by the larger groups to facilitate their exclusion from the management of oil resources management and decision-making as they continue to bear the environmental brunt of the activities. Lastly, there is the possibility of the larger groups getting higher derivation fund from oil had oil been found in their regions or if their region was the Niger Delta. These arguments summarise the crux of the agitations in the Niger Delta, even up in the current democratic dispensation.

The repressive and high-handed response of the Niger state led to popular disenchantment against the country. Following the grievous execution of the Ogoni nine in 1995, the nature of Niger Delta agitation changed from a largely peaceful engagement to a violence against the state. Anifowose notes that the Nigerian state's poor handling of the region's demand led to the formation of militant groups across the region, leading to widespread violence, insurgency, kidnapping, hostage-taking, oil pipeline sabotage, crude oil theft, gang wars, internecine struggles and so much else by way of anarchy and chaos⁶⁸. This situation sums up the Niger Delta crisis such that the region has for almost three decades not known sustainable peace. The emergence of militant groups, such as Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), among others demonstrate how bad the security situation in the region became⁶⁹. The introduction of amnesty for militants only allowed a window of relative peace in the region, but it has not led to sustainable peace⁷⁰. The Niger Delta crisis led to the loss of peace in the region and did serious harm to Nigeria's oil rent-dependent economy. Thus, Nigeria's high-handed, human rights-abusive response to Niger Delta demands not only hurt the region but also put the nation's economic health in peril.

⁶⁸ Ibid 29

⁶⁹ Ibid 53

⁷⁰ Ajala, Olayinka, 'Human security in the Niger delta: Exploring the interplay of resource governance, community structure and conflicts' (2016) 7 *Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy (The)* 81

5.0 CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL ENERGY TRANSITION: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NIGER DELTA

Oil and gas extraction in the Niger Delta has caused untold social, economic, environmental and political crisis in the region. When all these are put into perspective of the world's economy's gravitation towards being carbon-free, the situation of the region can be summed up as that of missed opportunities. The uncaring nature of the Nigerian state demonstrates its lack of positive engagement with the Niger Delta to address its demands, which are legitimate given decades of resource management exclusion and the accruing development benefits and the environmental impacts of oil and gas extraction in the region. The rise of climate change, which has been worsening, has necessitated the need for mitigation by reducing global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial times⁷¹. The emerging global stocktake, demanding the cessation an end to hydrocarbons, shows that the world has upped the new trajectory. This situation leaves the Niger Delta in a potentially precarious situation, with the Nigerian state having chosen to be irresponsible, given tokenistic interventions towards the development of the region. Hence, the region's case is that of missed opportunities, which are discussed as follows;

While the Nigerian state made a fortune from oil and gas extraction in the Niger Delta, it failed to invest adequately in the development of the region through oil proceeds. As it is, the region is one of Nigeria's least developed regions with palpable multidimensional impacts in infrastructure, education, healthcare, food security and the general ambience that promotes development⁷². The failure of government towards the Niger Delta has not allowed for a well-diversified economy in the region and the country at large. Comparatively, similarly oil-rich, developing countries around the world have reinvested oil proceeds to build robust socioeconomic breakthroughs in recent decades. The case of the United Arab Emirates, apparently transforming vast deserts into the world's favourite trade and commerce destinations remains

⁷¹ Ibid 15

⁷² Ibid 46

outstanding⁷³. Rather, Nigeria used the combination of legislative dispossession, high-handed response to the demands through state violence and a generally uncaring attitude towards development to turn the Niger Delta into one of the world's worst case studies of under-development impacts of resource-dependency. Thus, the Niger Delta is poised to emerge into the post-carbon era well-below its development potential, having, by a combination of factors lost the opportunity for a well-entrenched development.

The global gravitation towards a post-carbon energy scenario also leaves the Niger Delta in environmental wreckage. For over six decades, commercial oil and gas extraction in the region has led to serious environmental damage. The poor response of the state to this challenge has not allowed for the environmental revamp and restoration in Niger Delta. Rather than addressing the demands and ensuring the environmental restoration of the region to ensure a sound environmental ambience, the state chose financial accruals over the environment. This speaks to the relationship between humans and the environment, as the latter is reduced to a mere money-making tool without necessary repairs and care⁷⁴. The Nigerian case in the Niger Delta shows complete inertia towards environmental restoration as it took the government decades to acknowledge and take actions on the Ogoni oil spills, for example. While the establishment of the Hydrocarbon Remediation Project (HYPREP) is meant to ensure that Ogoniland and by extension, the Niger Delta's environment returns to pristine levels, critics argued that it has failed to do a good job⁷⁵. However, the body claimed that it has restored 75% of the polluted land in Ogoniland, with the shoreline also at 20% as of January 2025⁷⁶. The long years of delay in the environmental restoration come with social, economic and environmental implications for the

⁷³ Ibid 14

⁷⁴ Kingsley Eghonghon Ukhurebor and others, 'Environmental implications of petroleum spillages in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: a review' (2021) 293 *Journal of Environmental Management* 112872.

⁷⁵ Thisday, 'Issues in the Ogoni Oil Spill Cleanup' (Thisday Editorial, 2 January 2025) <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2025/01/02/issues-in-the-ogoni-oil-spill-cleanup/> accessed 21 April, 2025).

⁷⁶ Denis Naku, 'Ogoni cleanup: 75% of mangrove restoration complete – HYPREP' (Punch, 18 December 2024) <https://punchng.com/ogoni-cleanup-75-of-mangrove-restoration-complete-hyprep/> accessed 21 April, 2025.

region, as the delay is now threatening to hinder it in the move towards carbon cessation.

The Niger Delta crisis cause serious socioeconomic loss for the region, causing the relocation of businesses from the Niger Delta because of the insecurity. Thus, the region has, over the years, lost its opportunity for regional industrialisation. It has also stifled the development of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in the region, thereby denying the people economic opportunities. This resonates with a Nigeria Economic Alert report by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) that the South South region, which houses the majority of the Niger Delta had an unemployment average rate of 35%, the highest among the geopolitical zones, in the second quarter of 2020⁷⁷. Thus, the exit of oil and non-oil businesses caused massive loss of economic opportunities in the Niger Delta. This has implications for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for the region, as Ichofu notes that FDI flow to the region has been on a downward trend for some years⁷⁸. This also has implications for the national economy as it has been ailing from the combined effects of multifaceted social, economic and political crises across the country, with a corresponding sharp drop in national FDI⁷⁹. Thus, the Niger Delta is at the risk of emerging onto the post-oil era with damagingly low economic opportunities for the people.

Another missed opportunity orchestrated in the oil and environmental saga of the Niger Delta is the failure of government to sustainably explore community-led governance model for conflict resolution, enhancement of social cohesion and cultural preservation. Rather than engaging in this, the state has been found to favour divide and rule and compromising local elites through co-optation, including willing traditional leaders⁸⁰. Given the proven utility of community-led governance models for conflict resolution and general development, the

⁷⁷ PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 'Nigeria Economic Alert: Unemployment rate to hit 30% amid the effects of Covid-19 on the economy' (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, September 2020) <https://www.pwc.com/ng/en/assets/pdf/economic-alert-september-2020.pdf> accessed April 20, 2025.

⁷⁸ Friday Ichofu, 'An Evaluation of the Effects of Niger -Delta Crisis on the Flow of Foreign Direct Investment to Nigeria' (2025) 3 *Journal of Political Discourse* 57

⁷⁹ *Ibid* 73

⁸⁰ *Ibid* 64

Nigerian state did not leverage the inherent affordances of that option for ensuring sustainable peace and development in the Niger Delta. This, in the logic of the state and its handlers, was cheaper than a wholesome response to the resource control and environmental justice demands of the people. It has, however, proved costlier not just for the state, but also for the region as it lost its once time-honoured social cohesion and cultural preservation⁸¹. This is to the extent that Niger Delta communities can hardly speak with one voice even with existential issues affecting their members. It is also at the root of the now-common communal clashes in the region, such as the Ijaw-Itsekiri conflict, which has had serious human security outcomes in the affected communities⁸².

6.0 NIGER DELTA IN THE POST-CARBON ERA: RECOMMENDATORY POLICY/LEGAL AMELIORATIONS AS WAY FORWARD

Global energy is an imminent reality to which the world is gravitating. Though still in infancy, even with the details and modes of carbon exit still very controversial and emotional for resource-dependent nations, the trajectory towards the post-carbon era has invariable been triggered. With the allure of cheaper and more efficient energy, the development of renewable energy technologies to leverage solar, hydro and wind energy for a cleaner, less warm and more prosperous world⁸³. Thus, every society and region of the world should be in their best stead to leverage the emerging energy era. However, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria faces an uncertain entrance into this era following Nigerian states handling of oil and gas extraction in the region and its attendant social, economic, environmental and political outcomes. Thus, a lot needs to be done to address issues facing the region, which has lost many opportunities for well-balanced and sustainable development over the decades.

⁸¹ OS Aina, 'Beyond Amnesty and Adversarial Conflict Management Strategy for Sustainable Peace and Development in the Niger Delta Region' (2022) 17 *Journal of Humanities, Social Science and Creative Arts* 27.

⁸² Bisina, Joel Dimiyen. *Understanding postamnesty youth violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria* (2021) Diss. Walden University.

⁸³ Akshat Rathi, (2023) 'Climate Capitalism: Winning the Global Race to Zero Emissions' (1st edn, John Murray Publishers).

There is a need to boost the development of the Niger Delta as it has been underdeveloped over the years by an uncaring Nigerian state. Given the staggering infrastructure and general development deficit in the region, it is necessary and urgent for the government to invest massively in these areas to ensure that the Niger Delta does not emerge into the post-oil era as one of the worst oil bearing region of the world. While it is difficult to quantify the development deficit in the region, it is apparent that it is dauntingly complex. There have been efforts by the government to proffer solutions to the problem in the past, but the country has a major problem with policy implementation. The Niger Delta Master Plan acknowledges the complexity of the region's development deficit, proposing a complex multiple scenarios development model to address the various aspects of development it requires⁸⁴. There is also a need to audit and overhaul where necessary existing regional ameliorative and interventionist institutions and programmes such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC), which replaced the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 2000. This is because some of the interventions have turned out to be half-hearted measures that have failed so far to address the fundamentals of the Niger Delta crisis.

The foregoing will boost the Niger Delta regional economy because building critical infrastructure will enhance the movement of goods and services in and out of the region. This, along with other ameliorative steps, also has the potential to ensure the return of long-departed industries, especially in the non-oil sector and spur the rise of SMEs to boost the economy. The economy ailed over the years, and deepened poverty. With the unconscionably high rate of unemployment, especially among the youth, coupled with a high rate of under-employment, revamping the local economy through intentional diversification efforts will yield good outcomes. As a region that had long been accused of having the 'oil psychology'⁸⁵, that is the attitude of youth to have developed an entitlement feeling, thus expecting 'free money' from oil companies, the government and through anti-state criminal activities such as oil bunkering, kidnapping for ransom and armed robbery, among

⁸⁴ The Nigerian Economic Summit Group, '.

⁸⁵ Browne Onuoha, 'Publishing postcolonial Africa: Nigeria and Ekeh's two publics a generation after' (2014) 40 *Social Dynamics* 322.

others, retooling the local economy will allow the burgeoning number of youth to deploy the energies positively. The government should leverage the creativity and energy of the youth in this region to venture into massive renewable energy technology production. This, and other principles will help to revamp the Niger Delta into diversified, productive economy will place in better stead for the post-carbon era.

The Nigerian state and the Niger Delta need to take full advantage of the remaining business-as-usual window by righting all the hitherto wrong done to and by region to enhance its stability towards the impending global energy transition. Within the window that is winding down, Nigeria is still raising the majority of its revenue from oil and gas in the Niger Delta, hence there must be improve accruals to the region. The oil and gas derivation fund, for example, which is currently pegged at 13% by the 1999 Constitution and the 3% allocated to host communities in the Petroleum Industry Act 2021, is rather too small to drive the urgent and expansive development the Niger Delta in the next few years⁸⁶. The fact that the world countries, including Nigeria, are looking at the Year 2030 as a critical threshold in global energy transition according to the Paris Agreement and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), shows that Nigeria and the Niger Delta are in a rush against time before this deadline. Hence, the Business-As-Usual window may begin to close from this period, which means that Nigeria and by the extension, the Niger Delta may experience reduce oil revenue accruals from thenceforth. Hence, the current allocations are piecemeal relative to the required resources to develop the Niger Delta.

The ensuing global energy transition window has prioritised gas as a transition oil. With the clamouring for an even faster cessation of hydrocarbons, there is an urgent need to develop Nigeria's gas infrastructure to take full advantage of the transition window. The fact that Nigeria's gas reserve is greater than its oil means that it can leverage a vast amount of resources if the country is well-positioned to do that. The Nigerian government has shown much commitment to exploring this with the launch of the Nigeria Energy Transition Plan in 2021⁸⁷. The country's target is to reduce emissions by 45% by 2030, and this means

⁸⁶ Petroleum Industry Act, 'Petroleum Industry Act 2021' (PIA 2021).

⁸⁷ Ibid 11

that there would be greater appreciation of renewable energy and gas⁸⁸. Nigeria estimated its gas reserves to be 206.53 trillion cubic feet (tcf), of which 139.4 tcf is recoverable, placing the country as having the world's tenth largest proven gas reserves, with the potential accrual of \$803.4 trillion to the country⁸⁹. The implication of this, is that Nigeria must show more commitment towards the Niger Delta and its development as the prioritisation of gas as a transition oil gives the region another opportunity to recover the years of loss and under-development. Thus, the global energy transition window bodes well for Nigeria and the Niger Delta, if the country can ensure the availability of all contingencies to maximize the affordances of the window. This must also be accompanied by a more serious investment approach to the Niger Delta.

At the heart of Niger Delta's gravitation towards the post-carbon era is the urgent need for the environmental restoration of the Nigeria Delta. The massive historical oil spills across the Niger Delta has compromised the quality of land in the region and brought with it an unsavoury level of food security and health crisis in the region. It is also associated with the hampering of indigenous economy of the Niger Delta, thereby deepening rural poverty in the region. Hence, there must be an urgent and widespread environmental restoration in the region to address land degradation and acute pollution of surface and underground water. While some advances have been made in the Ogoniland oil spill cleanup, the pace needs to be faster, and HYPREP must extend its activities across the region and build capacity to ensure that the region enters into the post-carbon era with an ability to leverage fertile land and clean waters in the Niger Delta. This is an emotional aspect of the ameliorative efforts at developing the Niger Delta, given the repressive and wicked response of the Nigerian state to this quest in the past. Hence, a wholesome environmental restoration of the region is likely to bring closure to the some of the issues and long-held misgivings in state-civil society relations in the Niger Delta.

⁸⁸ J. S. Olayande, 'Energy transition for achieving net-zero emission by 2060.' (2022) *National Energy Summit, 5th-6th July, Abuja, Nigeria*.

⁸⁹ Nigeria Energy, 'The Role of Gas in Nigeria's Energy Transition: The "Decade of Gas' (2023, Nigeria Energy) <https://www.nigeria-energy.com/content/dam/markets/emea/nigeria-energy/en/2023/docs/NE24-Role-of-Gas-Nigeria-Energy-Transition.pdf> accessed 21 April, 2025.

Nigeria has for most of the oil extracting period relegated host communities and traditional institutions in the Niger Delta in oil resource management and decision-making. Rather than engaging with these critical institutions, the Nigerian state engaged in nefarious tactics that have benefited compromised local elites and impoverished the people. However, the region is worse in this regard, as the tactics cannot engender the sustainable development of the region. A critical path in the journey towards the global energy transition is to meaningfully engage and empower the host communities and their traditional institutions to ensure that the wholesome development of the Niger Delta. This is well-noted in Section 236, sub-sections a, b and c of the Petroleum Industry Act 2021 that maps out a window of 12 months of incorporating host communities across three possible oil extraction scenarios in the region⁹⁰. There is also the need to empower Niger Delta states and Local Governments to facilitate the necessary and representative multi-stakeholder approach to developing community-led model of oil and gas management and decision-making in Nigeria. This will also help to rein the hitherto unresponsive posturing of the MNOCs to local demands and realities in the Niger Delta.

The foregoing recommendations constitute the environmental justice approach to addressing the Niger Delta crisis and getting the region ready for the global energy transition. Having endured economic and political marginalisation and environmental damage from the long years of oil and gas extraction, the Niger Delta situation shows that while Nigeria as a resource-dependent received humongous revenue from the region's oil over the years, it has not shown commensurate commitment to addressing the environmental impacts this has had on the region. While the Nigerian state made a fortune from Niger Delta's oil, the region is reeling in environmental and other crises. Thus, the government and other stakeholders must ensure that all contingencies must align in preparing the Niger Delta for life without oil extraction. This is because, without adequately addressing the issues and proffering solutions to them, the injustice perpetrated by the Nigerian state, the MNOCs and compromised local elites will remain. This will also hunt the region in the emerging post-carbon era.

⁹⁰ Ibid 81

7.0 CONCLUSION

The history of oil and gas extraction in the Niger Delta is the history of state reliance on and domination of oil management, indifference to the environmental impacts of those activities, high-handed response to resource control and environmental justice demands and a complex and avoided regional crisis. This confirms the thesis that the costs and benefits of resource extraction are not experienced equally. While the Nigerian state got revenue and even killed to preserve its rents flow, the Niger Delta sank into environmental degradation, under-development, mass poverty, militancy and insecurity. The ensuing crisis from the irresponsibility of the Nigerian state in the Niger Delta leaves the region in a precarious situation as the world is gearing up for an energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Nigeria failed to adopt best practices in reinvesting resources from oil to develop the region from which the mainstay of its economy is drawn. This situation is at variance with the actions and position of peer nations in oil resource-abundant.

Nigerian must ensure that the Niger Delta gets environmental justice, which a complex of well-intentioned, global best practices-driven and disciplined fiscal and policy performance to ensure that the social, economic, environmental and political crises produced by oil and gas extraction in the region are dealt with, thereby placing the region in the best stead possible for the post-carbon era. While Nigeria and the Niger Delta are in a race against time as the windows for business-as-usual in climate governance are winding up, the remaining period can be used to correct the anomalies that led to the gory the region is in to ensure that it emerge onto the post-carbon era in comparable stead with similar oil hubs around the world.