

Petro-Aggression and Livelihood Challenges of Women Living with Disabilities in the Niger Delta

Emmanuel Nwakanma

Department of Sociology, University of Port Harcourt,
Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

Oil politics and economic violence present distinct challenges for women living with disabilities, amplifying existing vulnerabilities and creating unique forms of marginalisation in communities impacted by environmental degradation. Anecdotal evidence shows that the attendant consequences of ‘petro-aggression’ in the oil-rich Niger Delta region impacts negatively on the populace, particularly women. From environmental degradation to disrupted traditional livelihoods and its attendant socio-economic and health implications, women suffer multidimensional hardship that impacts their lives adversely. This study aims at investigating the complexities faced by women, especially those living with disabilities, in the Niger Delta, as a way to address the interconnected issues of oil politics, economic violence, and livelihood challenges in the region. The study adopts a cross-sectional qualitative research design involving 45 rural women living with disabilities in three Niger Delta States (namely, Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa States). Relevant data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions, and the findings were documented verbatim and presented using narrative analysis. Findings of the study reveal that environmental damages and displacements resulting from oil activities destroy traditional livelihoods relied upon by women with disabilities, deepening poverty and dependence. Furthermore, oil-related violence and instability often disrupt support systems and services specifically designed for people with disabilities, leaving them isolated and without essential support. As such, the study recommends, inter alia, that implementing inclusive development models, advocating for better protection, and promoting access to resources are key steps towards mitigating these challenges and ensuring their rights and well-being.

Keywords: Oil Politics; Economic Violence; Women Living with Disabilities; Livelihoods; Niger Delta.

Introduction

The Niger Delta, a region rich in oil reserves, presents a paradox wherein immense wealth coexists with widespread pervasive poverty and environmental degradation (Peterman, 2016; Amnesty International, 2015; Ibeanu and Ike, 2006; Watts, 2004). This paradox is particularly stark for women, who face unique vulnerabilities exacerbated by the complex interplay of oil politics, economic violence, and livelihood challenges. While the environmental consequences of oil extraction have been widely documented (Nwakanma and Joab-Peterside, 2020; Nwankwo and Uzodike, 2015; Oviasuyi and Uwadie 2010; Karl, 2008), the gendered dimensions of these impacts, particularly for women living with disabilities, remain understudied. This gap in scholarship is significant, as existing structural inequalities are often amplified in crisis situations, creating

unique forms of marginalisation (Nwakanma and Igbe, 2020; Enloe, 2014). Women with disabilities in the Niger Delta bear a triple burden: the systemic challenges associated with disability, the environmental degradation caused by oil extraction, and the socio-economic and political instability that pervades the region.

The politics of oil in the Niger Delta region, characterised by state and non-state actors' struggle for control over oil resources, consistently promotes conflict and violence, often resulting in widespread environmental damage, displacement (Oviasuyi and Uwadie, 2010; Karl, 2008), and economic violence. This form of economic aggression or what we refer to here as 'petro-aggression', disproportionately affects women, who often rely on natural resources for livelihood activities such as fishing, farming, and forest gathering (Peterman, 2016). Petro-aggression, describes two things: first, the environmental and economic violence and marginalisation perpetrated by oil companies and governments in resource-rich regions (Bassey, 2012; Watts, 2004); and second, the various manifestations of anger and frustration manifest due to the impact of the activities of oil industries (Nwakanma and Joab-Peterside, 2021). This includes resource control agitations, violent protests, pipeline sabotage, and militancy that has characterised the Niger Delta. These forms of violence create an environment of instability and insecurity that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including women with disabilities. For example, oil-related violence can disrupt access to essential services, such as healthcare and rehabilitation programmes, which are crucial for people with disabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Furthermore, the displacement caused by oil-related conflict can separate women with disabilities from their families and support networks, leaving them isolated from essential assistance. Furthermore, when the region is hostile, and when community life is disrupted or available resources are depleted and contaminated, women's traditional livelihoods are disrupted, pushing them further into poverty and dependence. For women with disabilities, these disruptions and loss of resources can be particularly devastating, as they may have limited alternative income-generating opportunities and often rely on support networks that are themselves disrupted by environmental degradation and violence.

The intersection of oil politics, economic violence, and disability creates a complex web of challenges for women in the Niger Delta. As scholars like Barnes (2016) have argued, people living with disabilities face additional marginalisation in such contexts. Their pre-existing vulnerabilities are amplified by limited mobility, restricted access to resources, and a lack of consideration in development plans. In the context of oil politics and economic violence, societal barriers that typically exclude women with disabilities are exacerbated, exposing these women to further exploitation, including forced marriages, sex trafficking, and other asymmetrical relationships.

This study aims to investigate these interconnected issues, exploring the specific ways these factors impact the lives and livelihoods of women living with disabilities in the region. By focusing on their lived experiences, this research seeks to move beyond generalized accounts of environmental

damage and violence to understand the realities faced by this particularly vulnerable group. This understanding is crucial for developing effective and inclusive development models, advocating for better protection mechanisms, and promoting access to resources that can empower women with disabilities and ensure their rights and well-being. The subsequent sections of this paper deals with a review of existing literature on the concept of ‘petro-aggression’ and the socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by women living with disabilities.

Petro-Aggression and Economic Violence in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta of Nigeria, a globally significant oil-producing zone, presents a stark paradox of immense resource wealth coexisting with widespread poverty, environmental degradation, and endemic violence. Part of the aim of this paper is to critically examine the phenomena of ‘petro-aggression’ and economic violence within the Niger Delta, arguing that these are not merely symptomatic of local discontent but are deeply entrenched structural outcomes of a rentier state, global capital dynamics, and entrenched power imbalances. Drawing on sociological theories of resource curse, conflict, and state-society relations, this analysis elucidates the mechanisms through which oil extraction has fostered a unique form of violence, impacting both human lives and livelihoods.

Petro-aggression refers to the militarised responses by the state and multinational corporations (MNCs) to grievances and resistance from host communities in oil-rich regions. This aggression manifests in various forms, including the deployment of state security forces to quell protests, the criminalization of dissent, and the direct or indirect support for proxy groups. As argued by Watts (2004), the ‘resource curse’ in the Niger Delta is not just about the failure of oil wealth to translate into development but also about the direct connection between oil and the proliferation of violence. The state's reliance on oil revenues disincentivizes accountability to its citizens, particularly those in the oil-producing areas, leading to a coercive relationship where dissent is met with force rather than negotiation (Obi, 2004). This institutionalised aggression contributes to a climate of fear and insecurity, further marginalising communities already suffering from environmental damage and economic deprivation.

Economic violence on the other hand, describes the systemic deprivation and marginalisation experienced by Niger Delta communities despite their immense contribution to Nigeria's national wealth. This form of violence is often subtle, structural, and insidious, stemming from policies and practices that dispossess local populations of their land, pollute their natural resources, and deny them equitable benefits from oil exploitation (Joab-Peterside, Porter and Watts, 2012). The Land Use Act of 1978, for instance, vested land ownership in the state, effectively disempowering indigenous communities from controlling their ancestral lands and the resources beneath them (Akpan, 2017). This legislative framework, combined with the activities of MNCs, has led to widespread environmental pollution (oil spills, gas flaring) that destroys traditional livelihoods

such as fishing and farming, pushing communities into deeper poverty (Watts, 2007). The lack of investment in social infrastructure, high unemployment rates among youth, and the diversion of derivation funds further exemplify this economic violence, breeding frustration and resentment that often escalates into physical aggression (Joab-Peterside, 2007).

Multinational corporations (MNCs) like Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and TotalEnergies are central players in this political landscape. Their operational presence and substantial investments grant them significant leverage, allowing them to often influence policy decisions and security responses. For instance, Amnesty International has detailed instances where oil companies provided logistical or financial support to Nigerian security forces implicated in human rights abuses during community protests (Amnesty International, 2005). The opaque nature of oil contracts and revenue allocation further exacerbates mistrust and accusations of collusion between state actors and MNCs. The joint venture arrangements between the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.) and these MNCs, which typically entail the NNPC Ltd. holding 55-60% equity, mean that both parties have vested interests in maintaining operations, sometimes at the expense of local community well-being (NNPC Ltd. Annual Reports, 2020).

The interplay between petro-aggression and economic violence creates a vicious cycle. The economic grievances, rooted in systemic neglect and environmental degradation, often provoke protests and resistance from local communities. These forms of resistance, whether peaceful or violent, are then met with state-sanctioned or corporate-backed aggression, leading to further human rights abuses and a deepening of the conflict (Obi, 2004). The "commodification of violence" also emerges in this context, where illicit activities like oil bunkering and kidnapping become lucrative alternatives for disaffected youth, further complicating the security landscape and creating a parallel economy of violence (Joab-Peterside and Zalik, 2009).

Socio-Economic and Environmental Challenges of Women Living with Disabilities

The socio-economic landscape for women with disabilities is often characterised by systemic discrimination and exclusion, leading to disproportionately high rates of poverty and limited opportunities. Employment and income are primary areas of concern. Women with disabilities frequently encounter significant barriers to accessing decent work, including discriminatory hiring practices, lack of accessible workplaces, and inadequate reasonable accommodations (United Nations, 2018). Even when employed, they often occupy precarious positions, earn lower wages than their non-disabled counterparts, and face a wider gender pay gap (Kavanagh et al., 2013). This economic marginalisation is further exacerbated by higher disability-related expenses, such as assistive devices, personal assistance, and accessible transportation, which deplete already limited incomes (Shakespeare, 2013).

Education serves as a critical pathway to socio-economic empowerment, yet women with disabilities often face significant obstacles in accessing quality education. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2013), these barriers can include inaccessible school environments, discriminatory attitudes from teachers and peers, lack of appropriate learning materials, and insufficient support services. Lower educational attainment directly correlates with reduced employment opportunities and lower earning potential, perpetuating a cycle of poverty across generations (Mitra, Posarac and Vick, 2017).

Beyond employment and education, access to healthcare remains a substantial socio-economic challenge. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011) notes that women with disabilities frequently report encountering physical barriers in clinics, a lack of accessible medical equipment (e.g., examination tables), and healthcare providers who lack adequate training or demonstrate discriminatory attitudes towards their specific needs, particularly concerning sexual and reproductive health. This can lead to poorer health outcomes, unmet medical needs, and a diminished quality of life. Also, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2018) further argues that women with disabilities are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, often due to heightened dependency, isolation, and limited access to justice or support services. Furthermore, the built and natural environments present formidable barriers for women with disabilities, often rendering public spaces, infrastructure, and emergency services inaccessible. Physical accessibility remains a pervasive issue. Many public buildings, transportation systems, and housing units are not designed with universal accessibility in mind, lacking ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and clear pathways (Peters, 2019).

Moreover, women with disabilities are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters and climate change. During emergencies, they face heightened risks due to inaccessible warning systems, evacuation routes, and shelters (Rohwerder, 2019). This is further complicated by additional factors, as the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR, 2013) notes that pre-existing mobility limitations, dependence on assistive devices, and the absence of inclusive emergency preparedness plans can hinder individuals with disabilities from evacuating safely or accessing essential aid. Additionally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) notes that climate change, through more frequent and intense extreme weather events, further exacerbates these vulnerabilities, often destroying accessible infrastructure and exacerbating existing health conditions.

Information accessibility is another critical environmental challenge. Information regarding public services, health campaigns, or disaster warnings is often not available in accessible formats such as Braille, large print, sign language, or plain language (United Nations, 2018). This lack of inclusive communication further marginalises women with disabilities, preventing them from making informed decisions, accessing vital resources, and engaging effectively with their environment. In the context of the experiences of rural women in the Niger Delta, this study

envisages that the seemingly intractable violence emanating from oil politics and ‘petro-aggression’ poses a humongous socio-economic, political, and public health risk to many women.

Methodology

This study employs a cross-sectional qualitative research design, given its suitability for providing rich, descriptive data about lived experiences and diverse perspectives. The study focused on three of the most oil-impacted states in the Niger Delta: Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa. Within these states, rural communities significantly impacted by oil exploration activities were identified, including Bodo in Rivers State, Ogbia in Bayelsa State, and Ugbori in Delta State. These communities were purposively selected owing to their proximity to oil extraction sites, documented environmental damage, and reports of socioeconomic hardship. A snowball sampling method was employed to recruit participants. A total of 45 women with disabilities participated in the study. Data collection involved two primary methods: in-depth Interviews and three (3) focus group discussions across the selected study areas. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate representation of participants' voices. The transcribed data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results

Demographic Information of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Data of the Research Participants

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Ogbia</i>	<i>Bodo</i>	<i>Ugbori</i>	<i>Freq (N=45)</i>	<i>Per (%)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Female	15	15	15	45	100.0
<i>Age</i>	18 – 27	2	1	2	5	11.1
	28 – 37	3	3	2	8	17.8
	38 – 47	5	4	3	12	26.7
	48 – 57	3	5	4	12	26.7
	58 – 67	2	2	4	8	17.8
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	3	3	2	8	17.8
	Married	5	4	7	16	35.6
	Widowed	5	4	3	12	26.7
	Others	2	4	3	9	20.0
<i>Religion</i>	Christianity	6	8	7	21	46.7
	Islam	1	0	3	4	8.9
	Others (e.g. ATR)	7	5	4	16	35.6

<i>Education Level</i>	Prefer not to say	1	2	1	4	8.9
	No Formal Education	6	5	5	16	35.6
	Primary Education	4	5	7	16	35.6
	Secondary Education	3	3	1	7	15.6
	Tertiary Education	1	2	1	4	8.9
<i>Occupation</i>	Others	1	0	1	2	4.4
	Fishing	4	3	3	10	22.2
	Farming	4	3	3	10	22.2
	Trading	5	6	5	16	35.6
	Public sector	1	2	2	5	11.1
	Private sector	1	1	2	4	8.9

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Table 1 above presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants, all of whom are females. The age distribution reveals that the youngest age group (18-27) represents the smallest proportion (11.1%). The 38-47 and 48-57 age cohorts each comprise over a quarter of the respondents (26.7% each), while the 28-37 and 58-67 age groups each make up 17.8% of the sample. Additionally, marital status varies, with married participants forming the largest category (35.6%). Widows and others each account for 26.7% and 20%, respectively, while singles represent 17.8% of the participants. In terms of religion, Christianity is the most represented (46.7%), followed by those who practice other religions not listed (35.6%), which likely includes traditional African religions. Islam accounts for a smaller proportion (8.9%), with an equal percentage choosing not to disclose their religious affiliation.

Educational attainment shows a significant proportion (35.6%) of the women having no formal education and an equal percentage having attained primary education. Secondary education accounts for 15.6% of the participants, while only 8.9% have tertiary education. A small fraction (4.4%) falls into the others category, including participants who learnt vocations and other formal skills like tailoring, weaving, and hair dressing. This highlights potential disparities in access to education, which can have significant implications for economic opportunities and social inclusion. Occupations are primarily concentrated in three categories: trading (35.6%), fishing (22.2%), and farming (22.2%). A small proportion (11.1%) is engaged in the public sector and the private sector (8.9%). The dominance of informal economic activities like trading, fishing, and farming suggests that these women may face precarious livelihoods and limited access to formal employment opportunities.

Table 2: *Types of Disability of the Research Participants*

<i>Disability Type</i>	<i>Ogbia</i>	<i>Bodo</i>	<i>Ugbori</i>	<i>Freq (N=45)</i>	<i>Per (%)</i>
<i>Physical Disabilities</i>	5	4	6	15	33.3

<i>Visual Impairment</i>	3	2	2	7	15.6
<i>Hearing Impairment</i>	2	3	1	6	13.3
<i>Intellectual Disabilities</i>	1	2	2	5	11.1
<i>Multiple Disabilities</i>	4	4	3	11	24.4
<i>Other (Specify)</i>	0	0	1	1	2.2
<i>Total</i>	15	15	15	45	99.9

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Table 2 above presents the distribution of disability types among the 45 women who participated in this study, categorised by their community of residence (Ogbia, Bodo, and Ugbori). The data show that those with physical disabilities constitute the largest category (33.3%). Visual impairment accounts for 15.6% of the sample, while hearing impairment represents 13.3%. Intellectual disabilities, such as difficulty learning in school, Down syndrome, and autism, are reported by 11.1% of the participants. Also, 24.4% of the participants reported experiencing multiple disabilities. One participant (2.2%) reported another disability—infertility. Including this detail is important because, although infertility is not always classified as a disability, it can have significant social and personal implications, especially for women in communities where fertility and motherhood are highly valued.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) of Respondents

The participants, who are women with disabilities residing in oil-impacted communities in the Niger Delta, exhibit characteristics suggesting predominantly low to lower-middle socioeconomic status (SES). This assessment is based on the following factors:

- **Occupation:** The majority of respondents are engaged in informal economic activities: trading (35.6%), fishing (22.2%), and farming (22.2%). These occupations are often characterised by precarious incomes, limited job security, and a lack of access to benefits like health insurance or pensions. These informal livelihoods suggest a vulnerability to economic shocks and limited opportunities for upward mobility. The small percentage employed in the public (11.1%) and private (8.9%) sectors may represent a slightly higher SES group within the sample, but their numbers are small.
- **Education Level:** A significant proportion of the women (35.6%) have no formal education, and an equal percentage have only primary education. Combined, these two groups represent over 70% of the sample. Limited education significantly restricts access to better-

paying jobs and further educational opportunities, strongly suggesting lower SES. The small percentage with secondary (15.6%) or tertiary (8.9%) education likely have greater opportunities, but they form a minority within the sample.

- **Location:** The respondents reside in rural communities within the Niger Delta, a region known for its underdevelopment and economic challenges. Oil exploration, while generating wealth at a national level, has often had negative local consequences, including environmental damage and disrupted traditional livelihoods. Living in oil-impacted rural communities suggests limited access to infrastructure, services, and diverse economic opportunities, all pointing towards lower SES.
- **Disability:** Living with a disability can create additional barriers to economic participation and often increases expenses related to healthcare, assistive devices, and other needs. This likely further constrains the socioeconomic status of the women in this study.

While a precise SES classification is limited, the data highlighted above strongly suggest that the participants predominantly come from low to lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds. This socioeconomic vulnerability is crucial when analysing the impact of oil exploration and related challenges on their lives. The study's findings reveal a web of challenges for women with disabilities in the Niger Delta, stemming from the intertwined forces of oil politics, economic violence, and the struggle for survival. The data paints a vivid picture of how environmental devastation, disrupted livelihoods, and weakened support systems combine to worsen existing vulnerabilities for this already marginalised group.

Livelihood Destruction and Health Challenges

The environmental destruction caused by oil spills and gas flaring has crippled traditional livelihoods. Participants shared stories of lost farmlands, dwindling fish populations, and polluted water, which have made their traditional occupations unsustainable. A woman from Ugbori recounted that ‘our farms before dey give us food and money, but now di land dey barren. Di oil don poison di ground. (*Our farmlands used to be very fertile and were our source of livelihood, but now they have become barren. The oil spills have poisoned our farmlands*)’ (J. Akpobome 2024, personal communication, 10 April). This view was corroborated by one participant from Bodo community, who noted that ‘di fish don go. Di oil spills don kill dem finish, and we no get any other way to feed our families. (*The fishes are gone. The oil spills have killed them all, and we have no other means to feed our families*)’ (K. Barinedum 2024, personal communication, 19 April). Beyond these environmental challenges, conflicts associated with oil politics force women, already facing economic hardship, to search for other ways to earn a living, often with little success because of pre-existing barriers and the added difficulties of their disabilities.

The research confirms the devastating health impacts of oil pollution. Participants' accounts are filled with stories of respiratory problems, skin diseases, and other ailments linked to the

contaminated environment. One woman from Bodo community described the situation in vivid terms, ‘di air wey we dey breathe, e thick with oil smell, and many of us dey cough tire. Our children get rashes wey no dey heal. (*The air we breathe is thick with the smell of crude oil, and many of us have persistent coughs. Our children have rashes that do not heal*)’ (S. Barikpoa 2024, personal communication, 18 April). Similarly, another participant from Ogbia described the polluted water sources, noting that ‘our streams no dey safe to drink again. Di water dey oily and e dey smell bad, and we no get any other source. (*Our streams are no longer safe to drink. The water is oily and has a bad smell, and we don't have any other source*)’ (N. Matthews 2024, personal communication, 4 May). These testimonies highlight the direct and daily impact of oil pollution on health, especially for women with disabilities who may struggle to access healthcare or alternative resources.

Disrupted Support Systems, Increased Isolation, Conflicts, and Displacement

Oil-related violence and instability further complicate matters by tearing apart vital support networks. Participants spoke of healthcare facilities becoming inaccessible due to conflict or displacement. Community-based support systems, crucial for people with disabilities, have either been weakened or destroyed. With regard to this, J. Ajisa (2024, personal communication, 10 May) notes that ‘di group stop to dey meet because many of di members don run go different place. We lose contact with each other, and e become very hard to get di help we need. (*The group stopped meeting because many of its members had relocated to different areas. We lost contact with each other, and it became very difficult to get the help we needed*).’ It is easy to see from the outcomes of this study that oil-induced conflicts in the region cause widespread displacement and isolation, which in turn intensifies existing vulnerabilities. Women with disabilities, in particular, are often left without essential support systems, making them more susceptible to various forms of exploitation, including sexual violence, forced marriages, and other forms of abuse. As T. Odulesi (2024, personal communication, 18 May) recounts, ‘we don already dey vulnerable because of our disabilities, and di oil don make am worse. We be easy target for those wey wan take advantage of us. (*We are already vulnerable because of our disabilities, and the oil situation has made it worse. We are easy targets for those who want to take advantage of us*).’

Pre-existing social barriers, such as limited access to education, skills training, and credit, already marginalise women with disabilities. The environmental consequences of oil production only deepen these inequalities. Women with mobility impairments, for example, find it extremely difficult to access alternative water sources or travel across damaged land to reach unaffected farms. One of the participants explained, ‘even if clean water dey somewhere else, how I go reach there? Di road dem bad, and I no fit waka far. (*Even if clean water is available somewhere around, how will I get there? The roads are bad, and I cannot walk far*)’ (I. Dickson 2024, personal communication, 7 May). Limited access to information and communication technologies also

prevents them from learning new skills or participating in advocacy efforts, keeping them trapped in a cycle of marginalisation.

The study also documents the disruptive effects of oil-related conflicts and displacement. Violent conflict, commonly fuelled by youth restiveness, cult-related activities, and oil theft, is a common feature in many states in the Niger Delta. Findings from this study show how these violent activities impact on women living with disabilities. As B. Agulu (2024, personal communication, 4 May) observed, ‘when the fight start, everybody run, but me, I no fit run fast. I dey fear, soldiers dey everywhere, and I no know where to go. (*When violence erupts, able-bodied individuals can run to safety, but I can’t run fast. I live in constant fear. Soldiers will be all over the place, and I wouldn’t even know where to go.*)’ This account highlights the heightened vulnerability of women with disabilities during times of conflict, particularly those with mobility impairments. Displacement disrupts not only their livelihoods but also their access to essential support systems. In a similar vein, one participant from Delta State, who is visually impaired, shared the view that ‘for the camp, everything strange, I no know where the toilet dey, where the food dey, people dey push me, and I dey fall down, life become very hard. (*In the camp, everything was unfamiliar, I didn’t know my way round; where the toilet was or where the food was, people kept pushing me, and I kept falling down, life became very difficult*)’ (E. Oyintari 2024, personal communication, 10 May) Again, this illustrates the challenges of navigating unfamiliar environments during displacement, especially for those with sensory impairments.

Unique Vulnerabilities of Women with Disabilities

The study also shed light on the unique vulnerabilities faced by women with disabilities, which are further compounded by the consequences of oil exploitation and the associated oil politics in the region. These are captured in the different quotes below and they encompass key vulnerabilities such as limited mobility, health needs, sexual violence, and forced displacement.

With regard to limited mobility, Mr. P. Kenneth (2024, personal communication, 15 May) from Bodo community stated that ‘before, I dey walk go market, but now, the road don spoil because of the oil company trucks. My crutches no fit support me for the bad road. I no fit sell my things for market again. (*Before, I used to walk to the market, but now, the road is damaged because of the oil company trucks. My crutches cannot support me on the bad road. I can no longer sell my goods at the market.*)’ This illustrates how damaged infrastructure, due to oil activities, can further restrict the mobility of women with physical disabilities, limiting their access to essential services and economic opportunities.

On the issue of health needs, one female participant expressed the concern that ‘... medicine dey very expensive, and now wey we no get money because the farm don spoil, I no know how I go

take buy am. The hospital sef far, and I no fit go. (*My medicine is very expensive, and now that we don't have money because our farm has been destroyed, I don't know how I will be able to buy it. The hospital is also far, and I can't go*)' (A. Sunday 2024, personal communication, 16 April). The experience shared by this interviewee highlights the increased challenges women with disabilities face in accessing healthcare due to economic hardship and the potential inaccessibility of medical facilities.

The study also reveals the increased risk of sexual violence faced by women with disabilities, particularly during conflict and displacement. This was vividly captured in an interview with Mr. N. Matthews (2024, personal communication, 4 May), who remarked, 'for the camp, many bad things dey happen. Some men dey take advantage of us because we dey vulnerable. (*In the camp, many bad things happen. Some men take advantage of us because we are vulnerable*).' This underscores the urgent need for protection mechanisms and support systems for women with disabilities in vulnerable situations.

Furthermore, the study highlights the specific challenge of forced displacement, noting how these residential dislocations expand the living challenges of persons living with disabilities in the region. As a participant from Bodo community shared, people living with disabilities in the region experience different levels of distress and confusion during displacements. In the words of the interviewee, 'they tell us say make we leave our house because the war dey come. I no understand wetin dey happen, but they just carry us go one place wey I no know. I dey miss my friends and my family. (*They told us to leave our house because war was coming. I didn't understand what was happening, but they just took us to a place I didn't know. I miss my friends and my family*)' (A. Sunday 2024, personal communication, 16 April). This testimony illustrates the confusion and distress experienced by women with intellectual disabilities during forced displacement, highlighting the disruption of their social support networks and access to familiar surroundings.

Discussion of Findings

The views of participants across all the themes above offer compelling insights into the multifaceted challenges experienced by women with disabilities in the Niger Delta, particularly in the context of oil exploration, environmental degradation, and systemic exclusion. The findings strongly align with existing studies that have documented the socio-ecological consequences of oil extraction in the region (see, for instance, Amnesty International, 2015; Bassey, 2012; Okoro and Inyang, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2007). Collectively, the findings of these studies have shown how widespread environmental damage, caused by oil spills and gas flaring, undermines human rights and escalates oil-related conflicts in the region.

Shakespeare (2018) argued that environmental degradation and its attendant consequences functions as a ‘threat multiplier,’ deepening pre-existing social and economic inequities for persons with disabilities. Akinola (2021) also notes that oil-related pollution and infrastructural neglect have intensified social exclusion in oil-producing communities, including the Niger Delta region, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Similarly, the study by Nwankwo and Ifeanacho (2020) has shown that oil exploration in the Niger Delta and its associated socio-political conflicts exacerbates poverty and undermines access to health and social services, with women and other vulnerable groups often bearing the brunt of these hardships. This aligns with the findings of this study, as participants confirmed that women with disabilities continue to face exclusion from mainstream narratives on oil-related impacts.

The findings of this study align with global scholarship on disability and development, which argues that environmental harm and social inequality intersect to create layered forms of disadvantage for marginalised populations (Mitra, 2018). This intersection of gender and disability also echoes the work of Awoniyi and Atijosan (2024), who found that Nigerian women with disabilities face a ‘double bind’ of gender-based violence and social stigma. Moreover, the pervasive sense of abandonment articulated by respondents of this study resonates with the United Nations’ (2015) findings on the uneven implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in fragile ecological zones.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the multifaceted challenges faced by women with disabilities in the Niger Delta region, demonstrating the devastating relationship between oil politics, economic violence, and livelihood insecurity. The findings reveal a clear and compelling narrative of how environmental degradation, conflict and displacement, exploitation, and pre-existing societal barriers converge to create unique vulnerabilities for this marginalised group. The women’s testimonies powerfully illustrate the direct impact of oil pollution on their health, the disruption of their traditional livelihoods, and the erosion of their support systems. The study confirms that the loss of access to clean water, fertile land, and fishing grounds, coupled with the instability caused by oil-related conflicts, significantly undermines their economic well-being and overall quality of life. Furthermore, the research highlights the increased risks of exploitation and violence faced by women with disabilities in this context, particularly during displacement and periods of instability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- i. **Environmental Remediation:** The Federal Government should invest in effective technologies and strategies for oil spill cleanup, soil remediation, and water purification. This can be achieved by establishing a dedicated fund for environmental remediation, overseen by an independent body with community representation. Implement strict environmental regulations for oil companies and enforce them rigorously.
- ii. **Sustainable Livelihoods:** Develop and implement sustainable livelihood programmes specifically tailored to the needs of women with disabilities. should be pursued through partnerships with NGOs, community-based organisations, and vocational training centres to deliver accessible and relevant skills training. Establish microfinance schemes with flexible terms and conditions for women with disabilities.
- iii. **Protection and Security:** Strengthen security measures in oil-producing communities to prevent violence and protect vulnerable populations, including women with disabilities. This includes deploying well-trained security personnel, improving community policing initiatives, and addressing the root causes of conflict. It is also important to develop and disseminate accessible information about safety and security procedures for women with disabilities, including strategies for self-protection and access to emergency services.
- iv. **Accessibility and Inclusion:** Implement universal design principles in the development and reconstruction of infrastructure in oil-impacted communities, ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities. This includes roads, public buildings, healthcare facilities, and transportation systems.
- v. **Healthcare:** Ensure that healthcare services and facilities are accessible and responsive to the specific needs of women with disabilities. There is need to partner with disability-focused organisations to train healthcare providers on disability inclusion. Ensure that healthcare facilities have ramps, accessible restrooms, and other necessary accommodations.
- vi. **Empowerment and Participation:** Promote the inclusion and participation of women with disabilities in decision-making processes related to oil exploration, environmental management, and community development. This can be achieved by establishing platforms for women with disabilities to voice their concerns and participate in community consultations. Ensure that their perspectives are reflected in decision-making processes.

References

- Akinola, A. O. (2021) 'Women, environmental conflict and human security in the Niger Delta', *African Security Review*, 30(1), pp. 40–56. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1892902> (Accessed: 23 March 2024).
- Akpan, A. (2017) *Oil, politics and violence: Nigeria's military dictatorships, 1966-1999*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Amnesty International. (2015) *Nigeria: "Shell knew": decades of oil spills in the Niger Delta*. Amnesty International Publications.
- Awoniyi, P. O. and Atijosan, A. (2024) 'Intersectionality of disability and gender-based violence: experiences of women living with disability in Nigeria', *Gender and Behaviour*, 22(2), pp. 345–363.
- Bassey, A.N. (2012) 'Women in the Niger Delta: environmental issues and challenges in the third millennium', *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 14 (8), pp. 12–24.
- Enloe, C. (2014) *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics*. University of California Press.
- Human Rights Watch. (2007) *"They came and destroyed our houses": forced evictions in the Niger Delta*. Human Rights Watch.
- Human Rights Watch. (2019) *"They took everything": violence against women with disabilities in Nigeria*. Human Rights Watch.
- Ibeanu, O. and Ike, I. (2006) *"Antinomies of wealth: oil revenue allocation, distribution, and utilization in the Niger Delta"*. Report for Oxfam GB, Abuja.
- Joab-Peterside, S. (2007) *On the militarization of Nigeria's Niger Delta: the genesis of ethnic militia in Rivers State, Nigeria*. Working Paper. Centre for Social Science Research.
- Joab-Peterside, S. and Nwakanma, E.N. (2020) 'Benefit-sharing and the utilization of 13 percent derivation fund in the Niger Delta region: the case of Bayelsa State', *Ibadan Journal of Sociology*, 5, pp. 53–68.
- Joab-Peterside, S. and Zalik, A. (2009) 'The commodification of violence in the Niger Delta', in Watts, M. (ed.) *Curse of the black gold: 50 years of oil in the Niger Delta*. PowerHouse Books, pp. 209–216.
- Joab-Peterside, S., Porter, D. and Watts, M. (2012) 'Rethinking conflict in the Niger Delta: understanding conflict dynamics, justice and security', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 12 (1), pp. 1–28.
- Karl, T.L. (2008) *Paradox of plenty: oil booms and petro-states*. University of California Press.

Kavanagh, A.M., Krnjacki, L., Beer, A. and Lamontagne, A.D. (2013) 'Disability and socioeconomic inequality in Australia: a decomposition of the gap in health and wellbeing', *Social Science & Medicine*, 88, pp. 26–34.

Mitra, S. (2018) *Disability, health and human development*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mitra, S., Posarac, A. and Vick, B. (2017) 'Disability and poverty in developing countries: a multidimensional study', *World Development*, 90, pp. 292–305.

NNPC Ltd. (2020) *Annual reports and financial statements*.

Nwakanma, E. and Igbe, J.E. (2020) 'Feminization of poverty and violence against women in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria'. Paper presented at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka Annual Conference: "Critical Issues and Challenges to Sustainable Development in Africa", Nsukka, Nigeria.

Nwakanma, E. and Joab-Peterside, S. (2020) 'Benefit-sharing and the utilization of 13 percent derivation fund in the Niger Delta region: the case of Bayelsa State', *Ibadan Journal of Sociology*, 11 (2), p. 38.

Nwankwo, B. O. and Ifeanacho, M. O. (2020) 'Oil politics and environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta: implications for sustainable development in Nigeria', *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 22(1), pp. 127–143.

Nwankwo, O.P. and Uzodike, U.O. (2015) 'Environmental degradation and conflict in the Niger Delta: a theoretical exploration', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 150, pp. 258–268.

Obi, C.I. (2004) 'The oil paradox: international relations and the Niger Delta question', *African Political Economy*, 31 (101), pp. 373–380.

Okoro, B.I. and Inyang, H.I. (2012) 'Women in the Niger Delta: environmental issues and challenges in the third millennium', *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 14 (8), pp. 126–139.

Oviasuyi, P.O. and Uwadie, J. (2010) 'The dilemma of Niger Delta region as oil producing states of Nigeria', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, 16, pp. 110–126.

Peterman, A. (2016) 'Environmental degradation, forced migration, and gender', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 42, pp. 385–404.

Peters, S. (2019) *Disability and development: invisible citizens*. Routledge.

Rohwerder, M. (2019) *Disability inclusion in humanitarian action: a review of evidence*. Humanitarian Policy Group.

Shakespeare, T. (2010) *Disability rights and wrongs revisited*. Routledge.

- Shakespeare, T. (2018) *Disability: the basics (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.
- UNDP. (2020) *Human development report 2020: the next frontier – Human development and the Anthropocene*. UNDP.
- UNFPA. (2018) *Guidance notes on addressing gender-based violence in humanitarian settings for persons with disabilities*. UNFPA.
- UNICEF. (2013) *The state of the world's children 2013: children with disabilities*. UNICEF.
- UNISDR. (2013) *Living with disability and disasters: a review of the literature*. UNISDR.
- United Nations. (2006) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol*. United Nations.
- United Nations. (2018) *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*. United Nations.
- Watts, M. (2004) 'Resource curse? Governmentality, violence and accumulation in the Niger Delta', *Development and Change*, 35 (5), pp. 1017–1045.
- Watts, M. (2004) *Crude politics: the violent landscape of oil in the Niger Delta*. Duke University Press.
- Watts, M. (2007) *Curse of the black gold: 50 years of oil in the Niger Delta*. PowerHouse Books.
- Watts, M.J. (2004) *Resource curse: oil, neoliberalism, and violence*. Routledge.
- WHO. (2011) *World report on disability*. World Health Organisation.