

Traditional Extractivism and the Politics of Sustainability: Interrogating International Oil Companies (IOCs') Social Investment Approaches in Nigeria's Niger Delta

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Abstract

Natural resource extraction in contexts of limited regulation can generate significant adverse environmental outcomes, with negative implications for sustainability. Enhancing sustainability in turn requires targeted policy approaches to protect impacted communities' social and economic conditions. This paper spotlights International Oil Companies' (IOCs) social investment approaches in the Niger Delta region and how it impacts sustainability in the context of traditional extractivism. Through the lens of the political economy perspective, this paper investigates the interplay between the political economy of oil in Nigeria and the social investments of IOCs, elucidating the repercussions for the region's development. The political economy perspective offers a robust framework for comprehending the intricate mesh of interests, power dynamics, and resource allocation that mold the actions of IOCs in the Niger Delta. This perspective provides a holistic foundation for deconstructing the manifold challenges and opportunities arising from oil extraction in the region. The paper posits that IOCs' extraction activities in the Niger Delta entrench practices and processes which undermine social investment goals and impede sustainable development. The paper further notes that despite substantial financial commitments, IOCs' social investments often fall short in delivering substantial enhancements in overall living conditions in the Niger Delta. The paper underscores the imperative of embracing a comprehensive and sustainable developmental approach that champions the well-being of local communities and the environment. As a result, it recommends among others that there should be paramount importance on community engagement, fortifying transparency and accountability, adopting a perspective oriented towards long-term development, championing environmental responsibility, and bolstering economic empowerment and cultural preservation.

Keywords: Politics, Social investment, sustainability, Extractivism, Oil Companies, Niger Delta.

Introduction

Natural resource extraction and the policies of extractivism that underline it have significant environmental impacts and can generate imbalances in the productive structure of locations where actual extraction take place (Alonso-Fernandez and Regueiro-Ferreira, 2022). These imbalances can be ameliorated through targeted social investment policies that seek to prevent or ameliorate where necessary the unintended outcomes of extractivism as it affects the productive base of host communities. However, whether governments or extraction companies are able to achieve these

depends on the political economy of extraction and the interest and purpose of the state in pursuing extractivism as a development model.

In the developing South, as it is in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, states have opted for traditional extractivism. Traditional extractivism happens when states, due to limited technological development, rely more on natural resource rents while allowing multinational companies influence and determine the legal frameworks, conditions and processes for resource extraction (Gudynas, 2011; Portillo, 2014). This leads to states playing marginal roles in the regulation and coordination of extraction allowing for lesser controls of the negative externalities that emerge from the process of extraction. The implication is that marginal control and regulation of the extraction industry leads to failure to implement best practices that in turn exacerbates the decline in social conditions in communities. This is the scenario in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta is one of the most important wetlands and coastal marine ecosystems in the world and is home to some thirty-one million people (Report of the Niger Delta Technical Committee, November 2008, p. 102). Crude oil extraction in the Niger delta has generated an estimated \$600 billion since the 1960s (Wurthman, 2006). This underscores the immense economic significance of the oil industry in the context of the global economy and, more specifically, Nigeria's economic landscape. Despite this wealth, majority of the Niger Delta's population live in abject poverty. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes the region as suffering from "administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict" (UNDP, 2006). This is further explained by Raimi & Boroh (2018) who argue that the prevalence of vast human development challenges and infrastructural deficit in the region shows a remarkable mismatch in terms of the massive wealth generated and socio-economic wellbeing in the region.

Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), for instance, manages operations covering more than 31,000 square kilometers (SPDC, Nigeria Brief, The Environment, 1995). Interestingly, in spite of the extensive operational footprints that companies like SPDC and other International Oil Companies (IOCs) have in the region, the Niger Delta continues to suffer from persistent and adverse ecological impacts. Interrogating social investment in host communities becomes even more salient as increasing divestment of onshore assets by IOCs raises questions about socio-economic survival in these communities. Implicitly, there is a seeming disconnect between the intent and outcome of social investment, one that is shaped by the impacts of traditional extractivism in the region. This disconnect raises questions about the effectiveness of these investments in achieving long-term sustainability. How will increasing divestments impact the ability of local communities to sustain their livelihoods, after decades of degradation of their natural environment, and whose responsibility will it be? Is the current iteration of social investment approaches capable of ameliorating socio-economic uncertainties in these communities? How has politics impacted the outcomes of social investment attempts in the region? How does the interplay of politics and social investment efforts affect sustainable development outcomes in the region?

This paper proceeds with the proposition that the arising from the state's preference for traditional extractivism, dynamics of social investment of IOCs in the Niger Delta is nested in politics rather than genuine intentions to solve the many social, economic and environmental challenges in the region. This is a gross violation of the Triple Bottom Line framework that should ordinarily guide all responsible companies (Raimi and Boroh, 2018). It is from this plank of understanding of responsible extraction that this paper proceeds with the interrogation of social investment efforts of IOCs and sustainable outcomes in the Niger delta.

Conceptual Framework

There are four concepts associated with this work and the framework below shows their intricate relationship. These concepts are politics, sustainable development, international oil companies (IOCs) and the Niger Delta region. The intent is to outline how the processes and dynamics associated with the nature and strategy of social investment contributes to politics of class accumulation which in turn produces unintended outcomes for communities that suffer the direct negative externalities of crude oil extraction in the Niger delta. This conceptual framework is better understood when deconstructed within the context of the objectives of social investment and the specific social and economic contexts wherein it is implemented. It highlights how the interchanges and intermix between actors (policy makers and implementing agencies), beneficiaries (host communities and community leadership) combine to produces both intended and unintended outcomes and how these shapes objective realities in the Niger delta.

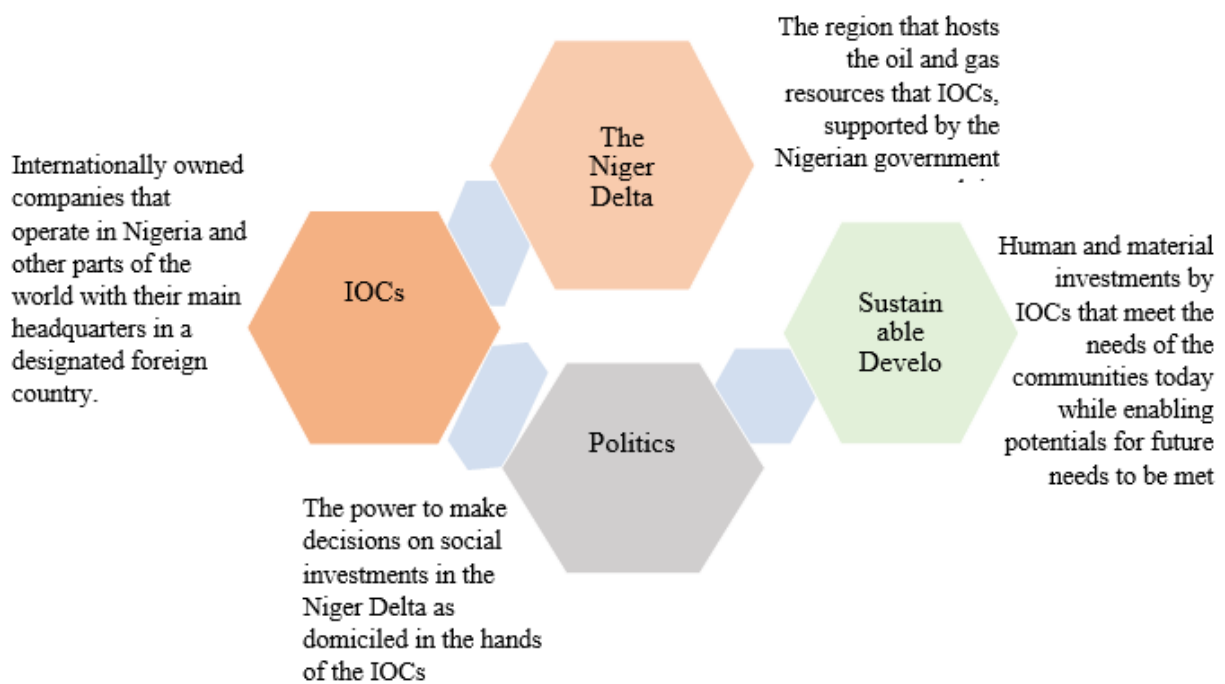


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

From Fig. 1 above, it is easy to see that politics in the context of this work relates to the power of the IOCs to make decisions on what to invest in as social interventions in the host communities where they operate. This clearly defines the domain of social investment power due to the fact that IOCs maintain some level of decision-making influence around investments, a situation that the introduction of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIA) seemingly has failed to correct. The interplay of politics and decision-making around extraction in the region is captured by David Easton’s position on politics as the ‘authoritative allocation of resources and values for the society’ (Easton, 1965). Politics encompasses the various processes through which those who control power respond to pressures from the larger society by allocating benefits, rewards or penalties. When captured in this context, the dynamics of decision-making around extraction and the role of oil companies can be simply illustrated as outcomes of the politics of extraction in the Niger delta.

Politics involves differing interests within a given unit of rule and each conciliated by giving them a share in power, importance to welfare and the survival of the whole community. Politics also deals with the interpersonal, intergroup and international quest for power. It locates politics in all

types of human communities where individuals, groups and states compete for influence, power and influence Ntete-Nna (2004). Nevertheless, a failure to understand that politics is a process of compromise and reconciliation is necessarily frustrating and difficult. This is so because it involves listening carefully to the opinions of others which leads to the growth of the democratic process across the developed world. It is in the absence of this healthy compromise between the IOCs and the communities in the region that social investment frustrations are recorded. Although Stoker (2006) puts it that, 'Politics is designed to disappoint'; its outcomes are 'often messy, ambiguous and never final'. This clearly shows why the politicization of social investment in the Niger Delta region has huge adverse implications for sustainable development.

Interestingly, playing politics with social investment undermines the very foundational meaning of the concept of sustainable development as introduced by the Brundtland Report of 1987. This is perhaps why some argue that "Development that meets the needs of the people today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" means very little under authoritarian socioeconomic investment processes. The sad reality is that the Niger Delta region houses a huge laboratory where authoritarian social investment is practiced and this has had and continue to have severe negative impacts on the people and their livelihoods. Decades of crude oil extraction has had significant impacts on everyday survival in the region. Natural capital upon which traditional livelihoods depend have been adversely affected and destroyed (Oyebamiji & Mba, 2013; Nwosu, 2013). More than the socio-economic impacts, struggles over environmental protection and access have led to loss of lives in communities (Kotingo & Amuyou, 2015). The combination of these externalities of extraction in the region has led to looming environmental crises and scarcity in the region.

Politics and Social Investment in the Niger Delta – A Brief Review of Literature

The politicization of social investments by IOCs and hence sustainable development has received some huge attention by scholars in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The argument by most of these scholars rests on the negation of the foundational definition of the concept of sustainability which sees development which meets the present needs of individuals without hindering the future needs of generations yet unborn (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) as sustainable. In light of this, Okwor and Odo (2019) accuse the IOCs of not living up to this definition especially as the huge destruction of local livelihoods in the region clearly suggests that generations yet unborn may not meet their needs because the requirements to do so may not be available to them.

The pursuit of social investments is fundamentally aimed at catalyzing lasting change and improving the quality of life. Despite targeted policy approaches towards sustainable social investment, very little progress has been made as strategies of implementation have been politicized and implementation embedded into clientelist networks as currency for compensating political loyalty both at the national, state and community levels. To achieve these investments successfully, a deeper understanding of the essential needs of the Niger Delta's populace is imperative. Rather than merely measuring expenditure, the focus should be on achieving the most effective and meaningful outcomes. This approach necessitates full citizen engagement, allowing them to realize their untapped potential – a process akin to unlocking local resources.

While IOCs have been engaged in social investment initiatives, there remains much work to be done. This is evident in Chevron's evolving approach, which shifts the emphasis of social investments towards economic development, employment generation, and the augmentation of local incomes. Such a shift aligns with the aspiration for genuine wealth creation within local communities (Grant

& Kaplan, 2013). However, the politicized nature of IOCs' involvement in the region has sometimes hindered the realization of these transformative objectives.

The multifaceted operations of oil companies in the Niger Delta, encompassing exploration and production (Upstream), the midstream distribution system involving tankers and pipelines transporting crude oil to refineries, and downstream activities like refining, marketing, and retail distribution through gasoline stations, have collectively wrought a grim toll on the region (Raimi, Onaolapo, Ige & Charles, 2015). Regrettably, the wealth generated from these operations has failed to translate into improved living conditions for the local populace. In this backdrop of neglect and the politicization of oil resources, the Niger Delta has become a crucible of unrest. Armed groups and criminal organizations, acting on behalf of the marginalized region, have sought resource control through illicit activities such as oil theft and violent acts. These actions, often deemed as reactions to the perceived injustices perpetrated by the oil industry, have exacerbated the region's instability.

Evidence in the region shows that host communities housing oil infrastructure have continued to bear the brunt of the negative externalities of oil extraction arising from unsustainable drilling and oil transportation processes. Local communities have continued to suffer environmental damage and scarcity. Interventions have been influenced mostly by state capture considerations that entrench primitive accumulation.

Sustainability and environmental boost are fundamental to the overall wellbeing and development in the Niger Delta. More than 60 per cent of the people in the region depend on the natural environment for their livelihood. However, this has been very difficult as natural capital on which livelihoods depend have been compromised by pollution and environmental damage arising from resource extraction.

According to ANNON (2006), the Niger Delta is "one of the world's most severely petroleum-impacted ecosystems". They stated: that "The damage from oil operations is chronic and cumulative, and has acted synergistically with other sources of environmental stress to result in a severely impaired coastal ecosystem and compromised the livelihoods and health of the region's impoverished residents."

The Niger Delta has an enormously rich natural endowment in the form of land, water, forests and fauna. These assets, however, have been subjected to extreme degradation due to oil prospecting. For many people, this loss has been a direct route into poverty, as natural resources have traditionally been primary sources of sustenance (UNDP, Niger Delta Human Development Report, 2006).

The oil companies, particularly Shell Petroleum, have operated for over 30 years without environmental regulation to guide their activities (UNDP, 2006). Although, the oil industry in the Niger Delta comprises the government and multinational companies. The multinational companies, however, are the major operators, nonetheless, research has shown that the state's approach to extractivism has rendered it weak in regulating the activities of oil companies in the region. This has contributed to the failure not only to protect the environment but also remediating legacy crude oil pollution sites. Essentially, rural communities that play host to oil infrastructure has continually suffered the impacts of oil pollution, further contributing to the calls for environmental rights protection for these communities.

Given the preference for traditional extractivism by the Nigerian state, oil companies have exploited the weak extant regulatory system, and their operations are characterized by failure to take appropriate preventive and remedial action in relation to pollution and environmental damage.

Again, environmental governance in the region is plagued by blockages to access to information by communities as environmental impact assessments are produced without recourse to international best practices. Implicitly, access to information and opportunities for participation by community folks exist only on policy papers and legal framework documents. An internal SPDC report highlighted the lack of transparency in the company's operations in relation to many issues that affect communities, and the negative impact this has. While some information may legitimately be considered confidential, companies frequently take the approach that they will not disclose data unless required to by a court of law with competent jurisdiction. Notably, transparency and access to information in the extractive sector are critical factors in building trust and better co-operation with communities.

Essentially, there is a significant disconnect between the wealth the region generates for the Nigerian government and the transnational oil companies extracting oil from the region, and the region's human development realities. In agreement, the World Bank (2008) in her country analysis report on Nigeria concludes that more than anywhere in the world, the Niger Delta typifies the paradox of low development in an environment of rich natural resources. Such poor remark have continued till date and not many changes made or felt.

The low level of development indices in the region is not only blamed on the government as IOCs also share in the burden. As destruction of means of livelihood of the inhabitants of the region by IOCs received little or no concern from successive governments, IOCs and the international communities. This notwithstanding, the IOCs with businesses in the region argues that it is the responsibility of government of the host communities to develop these communities (Adati, 2012), because of the fact that they have not failed in their obligation to the government in the payment of taxes and royalties and that any efforts to provide any development intervention to the immediate communities is borne out of good will (Idemudia, 2007). This cannot be unconnected to the poor regulatory framework on the responsibilities of IOCs to the host communities. The community development efforts by International Oil Companies (IOCs) in the region have fallen short of expectations, despite their decades-long presence. While IOCs have emphasized social objectives as part of their policies to align with international best practices, there is a concern that these companies operating in the Niger Delta are not prioritizing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) but are instead engaged in corporate philanthropy. This shift has contributed to a perception of irresponsibility in their operations, as evidenced by the persistent issue of oil spills.

The provision of development by IOCs projects is often bedeviled by several factors, which are the problems of poor business environment, corruption of government officials among others. In Nigeria, it is argued that our business environment does not encourage corporate performance. For instance, our high rate of insecurity, constant fights between ethnic regions, crisis of the Fulani herdsmen, kidnapping, banditry, political strife, sabotage of oil installations, and other social unrest impedes smooth business operation. This according to Adati (2012) often discourages investment in an already capital intensive and volatile energy industry. The attitude of the youths in the Niger Delta Region also militates against development and the activities of the IOCs often negatively impacts on the environment which have continued to raise fundamental questions on the sustainability of their processes.

Framing a Political Economy of Oil in the Niger Delta through the Marxist Lens

The Marxist Political Economy perspective, rooted in the works of Karl Marx, serves as a valuable theoretical framework for scrutinizing the politics of sustainable development by International Oil Companies (IOCs) in the Niger Delta. This perspective, informed by the critiques of capitalism, is grounded in several key assumptions. The Marxist Political Economy approach underscores the

notion of class struggle, a concept that resonates significantly with the Niger Delta context. As Obi (2009) highlights in "Oil Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Militant Youth and the Petro-State," the region is marked by stark class divisions and tensions between IOCs, the Nigerian government, and marginalized local communities. These divisions are integral to understanding the power dynamics that influence decisions related to sustainable development projects and resource allocation.

Moreover, the Marxist perspective places a central emphasis on capitalist exploitation. Okwor and Odo (2019) in their work on "The Political Ecology of Oil and Gas Activities in the Nigerian Aquatic Ecosystem" delve into the exploitation inherent in oil extraction activities in the Niger Delta. They emphasize how IOCs, driven by profit motives, often extract oil resources at the expense of the local communities and the environment, contributing to long-standing socio-economic disparities and environmental degradation.

Furthermore, the concept of structural inequality, a cornerstone of Marxist analysis, is highly relevant when studying the Niger Delta. This perspective sheds light on how the concentration of wealth and resources from oil production exacerbates structural inequalities within the region, as discussed by Le Billon (2006) in "The Scramble for Africa: Oil, Inequality, and the Global South." Historical materialism, another key element of Marxism, underscores the role of historical and material conditions in shaping societies. This is particularly pertinent in the Niger Delta, where a historical trajectory of oil exploitation has left indelible marks on the region's sustainable development prospects. Understanding this historical context is vital for crafting effective and equitable sustainable development solutions. This is in addition to understanding the dialectical relationship inherent in this historical context. According to Raimi and Asamaoewei (2019) note that the Marxist Political Economy (MPE) perspective enables a robust examination of dialectical relationships among various social structures within the Niger Delta, while also considering the unique economic infrastructure within the scope of this analysis.

The Marxist Political Economy perspective, with its emphasis on class struggle, capitalist exploitation, structural inequality, and historical as well as dialectical materialism, provides a critical lens through which it analyzes the complex socio-economic and political dynamics at play in the Niger Delta. Literature spanning various years, such as Obi (2009), Okwor and Odo (2019), and Le Billon (2006), offers valuable insights into the relevance of this perspective to the study of IOCs' role in sustainable development in the region. Therefore, the adoption of the Marxist Political Economy perspective for this paper on the politics of sustainable development by International Oil Companies (IOCs) in the Niger Delta greatly enhances its analytical framework. By grounding the analysis in Marxist tenets, the paper helps to highlight the region's socio-economic complexities with a critical and nuanced approach. This perspective underscores the significance of power dynamics among IOCs, the Nigerian government, and local communities and emphasizes the inherent exploitation in oil extraction activities. It also highlights how structural inequalities stemming from the concentration of oil wealth impact the region. Ultimately, this theoretical framework not only aids in the examination of the status quo but also serves as a foundation for crafting equitable and sustainable policy recommendations to address the region's development challenges.

Understanding the Social Investment Landscape of IOCs in the Niger Delta region

International Oil Companies (IOCs) operating in the Niger Delta region have channeled their social investment efforts into various critical areas aimed at addressing the region's socio-economic and environmental challenges. While these initiatives underscore their commitment to making a positive impact on the communities where they operate, several factors (discussed later) have tended to undermine their investments in host communities. One of the primary areas of focus for IOCs in the Niger Delta is education. They have invested in constructing and renovating schools,

providing scholarships, and distributing educational materials to enhance the educational landscape of the region. This investment in education aligns with the broader goal of improving human capital and empowering local communities (Okon, 2015). In addition, healthcare is another vital sphere of social investment. IOCs have established healthcare facilities and supported medical outreach programmes to enhance access to quality healthcare services for local residents. This investment is crucial for addressing the healthcare disparities prevalent in the region, contributing to improved health outcomes (Okwor & Odo, 2019).

Furthermore, infrastructure development constitutes a significant portion of IOCs' social investments. They have taken on projects to build and repair roads, bridges, and other essential infrastructure elements. These initiatives aim to improve transportation and connectivity within the region, thereby facilitating economic growth and development (Nwokocha, 2018). IOCs recognize the importance of community empowerment and, as such, support community-based organizations and provide skills training and capacity-building programs. These initiatives empower local communities to take charge of their development and participate actively in decision-making processes (Okwor & Odo, 2019). Also, environmental conservation is a critical concern in the environmentally sensitive Niger Delta. IOCs have undertaken environmental remediation projects and support conservation efforts to mitigate the environmental impact of their operations. These investments are essential for addressing ecological degradation and promoting sustainability (Okon, 2015).

In their social investment portfolio, IOCs also focus on supporting local livelihoods. This includes promoting sustainable agriculture, providing microfinance options, and offering entrepreneurship support to encourage economic self-sufficiency among local residents (Inyang & Edet, 2019). Cultural and social programme are not overlooked either. IOCs actively support cultural festivals, arts, and community events, recognizing the significance of preserving and celebrating local cultures. These initiatives contribute to a sense of identity and pride within the communities (Raimi & Boroh, 2018).

While IOCs have demonstrated their commitment to social investments in these areas, the impact and sustainability of these initiatives continue to be topics of discussion and scrutiny within the Niger Delta region. Local communities, governments, and civil society organizations actively engage in monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of these investments to ensure they align with the development needs and aspirations of the people. One prominent theme in the literature is the fact that IOCs' social investments in the Niger Delta reflect a huge mismatch between financial investment and outcome. Nkwocha (2018) argues that despite substantial financial commitments, these investments often fail to bring about significant improvements in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and overall living conditions. The focus on short-term and often visible projects, such as building schools or health centers, may not necessarily lead to sustainable development outcomes (Okwor & Odo, 2019).

Furthermore, the literature highlights a lack of community engagement in the planning and execution of social investment projects. Nwokocha (2018) underscores the importance of meaningful community participation to ensure that projects align with local needs and expectations. Without such engagement, social investments may be misaligned with the immediate priorities of the people. Transparency and accountability issues in IOCs' social investments have also come under scrutiny. Several studies (Adesanya, 2019; Marc-Antione, 2018) reveal instances of mismanagement, corruption, and diversion of funds meant for community development. This has raised concerns about the effectiveness and integrity of these initiatives. This is perhaps why the literature underscores the need for a more holistic approach to social investments. Adesanya (2019) argues that IOCs should address not only immediate needs but also long-term development goals and environmental concerns. This includes measures for cleaning up oil spills and mitigating environmental damage, which are essential components of sustainable development in the region.

How Class Politics affects the Sustainable Development efforts of IOCs in the Niger Delta

Class politics significantly influences International Oil Companies' (IOCs) sustainable development interventions in the Niger Delta region. This influence is evident in the unequal distribution of benefits from oil extraction, with the elite and political class often benefiting more from contracts, employment opportunities, and financial incentives. This unequal distribution leaves the majority of the local population marginalized (Obi, 2009). In addition, the politics of class also impacts decision-making processes regarding the design and implementation of sustainable development projects. The interests and priorities of the socio-economic elite may take precedence over those of marginalized communities (Obi, 2009).

Control over resources, including land and revenues, is central to class politics in the Niger Delta. Disputes over resource ownership and access have led to conflicts that can disrupt sustainable development efforts (Le Billon, 2006). Marginalized communities often mobilize and advocate for their rights, demanding a fair share of oil wealth and more equitable sustainable development projects. This activism is driven by the disparities in benefits and opportunities (Obi, 2009). Class-based disparities can also affect the transparency and accountability of sustainable development initiatives. The elite tend to have more influence in diverting funds or mismanaging resources meant for community projects, exacerbating inequality (Marc-Antione, 2018).

Additionally, the political economy of Nigeria significantly influences the unsustainable practices of International Oil Companies (IOCs) in the Niger Delta region, and by extension, hampering sustainable development. Nigeria's political economy is characterised by patronage networks and rent-seeking behaviour. IOCs often partake in rent-seeking activities by offering lucrative contracts and financial incentives to political elites and government officials, securing favourable terms and safeguarding their interests (Le Billon, 2006). Also, weak regulatory enforcement within Nigeria's political economy grants IOCs leeway to engage in unsustainable practices. Inadequate monitoring and lax enforcement of environmental regulations can result in oil spills and pollution, adversely affecting local communities and ecosystems (Obi, 2009).

Nigeria grapples with the challenges of the "resource curse," where the abundance of natural resources can foster corruption and mismanagement. IOCs' actions inadvertently exacerbate this curse by engaging in corrupt practices and avoiding transparency (Marc-Antione, 2018). In this regard, corruption and mismanagement of social investment initiatives provides conditions that undermine the sustainable development interventions of IOCs in the Niger Delta region. Hence, the political economy of Nigeria characterized by inequality and fueling of resource control disputes in the Niger Delta, contributes to social unrest and conflict that combine to further jeopardize the sustainable development efforts of IOCs. Interestingly, unsustainable practices, such as oil spills and land degradation, often serve as triggers for community protests and militant activities (Nkwocha, 2018). The profit-oriented focus in Nigeria's political economy often leads IOCs to prioritize immediate gains over long-term sustainable development. This clearly results in insufficient investments in infrastructure and community development, with a limited emphasis on wealth creation for local communities (Adesanya, 2019).

While all the submissions discussed under this section above address the structural political economy (especially the class relations) without the Niger Delta, a few scholars have concentrated on the emerging class relations within the host communities as a subject of concern with regard to the sustainability of the region. For instance, Amadi, Imoh and Obomanu (2016) alluded to the making of militia capitalists from the pull of warlords who graduate into becoming rich through the use of violent conflicts. This happens when they now, through violent conflicts, gain mouth-watering contracts from IOCs and political appointments from government given them inroad into

the propertied or ruling class. Clearly this has implications for sustainable development by creating what Raimi and Boroh (2018) have referred to as the cycle of violence. Interestingly, there is also the worry about an expansive army of conflict proletariats who continue to fight with the hope of pushing their class boundaries towards becoming part of the militia capitalists. This scenario which can be traced to the unsustainable practices of the IOCs under the support of the government now stands opposed to sustainable development of the region given its benefit captor orientation.

Conclusion

The exploration of the politics of sustainable development by International Oil Companies (IOCs) in the Niger Delta region reveals a complex interplay of factors that significantly impact the socio-economic and environmental landscape of the area. Throughout this paper, we have delved into the critical role of the political economy perspective in understanding the dynamics at play. The political economy of Nigeria serves as the backdrop against which IOCs operate in the Niger Delta. This intricate political-economic landscape is characterized by patronage networks, rent-seeking behaviours, weak regulatory enforcement, corruption, and resource conflicts. These factors have given rise to unsustainable practices by IOCs, ultimately undermining the sustainable development of the region.

As highlighted in the literature, these unsustainable practices encompass various dimensions. IOCs engage in rent-seeking activities to secure favourable terms and protect their interests, often at the expense of environmental and community well-being. Weak regulatory enforcement allows for oil spills and pollution to harm local communities and ecosystems. Corruption and lack of transparency in IOCs' operations contribute to the resource curse phenomenon. Additionally, the region experiences social unrest and conflict, often triggered by IOCs' unsustainable practices. Short-term profit-driven approaches further hinder long-term sustainable development. In essence, the political economy perspective serves as a lens through which we can understand the intricate web of interests, power dynamics, and resource allocation that shape the actions of IOCs in the Niger Delta. It underscores the need for a holistic and sustainable approach to development that transcends short-term gains and prioritizes the well-being of local communities and the environment. It is noted in this paper that redirecting social investment in the Niger Delta will be needed to achieve a number of goals. These goals will include but not limited to the following. The need to prioritize community engagement and participation which will require IOCs to actively involve local communities in the planning, execution, and monitoring of social investment projects. This inclusive approach ensures that initiatives align with community needs and priorities, fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability. There will also be the need to Enhance Transparency and Accountability through the implementation of rigorous monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure that funds allocated for social investments are used efficiently and effectively. Transparency and accountability are crucial to building trust with local communities and stakeholders.

Adopt a Long-Term Development Perspective which will require a shift from short-term, visible projects to initiatives that address long-term challenges and environmental concerns. IOCs should commit to holistic development that includes environmental remediation and sustainable community growth. There is also the goal of promoting environmental responsibility through the active engagement in environmental conservation and remediation projects. IOCs should adopt eco-friendly practices, address the ecological impact of their operations, and take responsibility for cleaning up oil spills and mitigating environmental damage. Lastly, there will be the need to support economic empowerment and cultural preservation. This will require investments in skills development, entrepreneurship, and economic self-sufficiency programs to empower local

communities. Additionally, continue to support cultural events and traditions, preserving local cultures and fostering a sense of identity within the communities.

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