



Corruption as a Contributing Factor to Unemployment and Environmental Pollution in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Perspective

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Abstract

The need to root out corruption from the system of nations for all round national peace, growth and development cannot be over emphasized. This study has been undertaken to examine corruption as a contributing factor to unemployment and environmental pollution in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Descriptive survey was adopted for the study and multistage sampling techniques was used in the process. The study was narrowed down to two states within the Niger Delta. The population of the study comprised former and present employees of all illegal oil refineries (dumps) within the region. However, the total respondents sampled were two hundred, questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data for the study. The findings of the study include high level of corruption among political leaders and public office holders, illegal oil activities because of unemployment, crude oil theft and its local distillation process as a major cause of environmental pollution. The study recommended among other things that government should rehabilitate the youths who engage in these activities, recognize their skills and potentials, legalize their activities with strict supervision, and support them with modular refineries to reduce unemployment and dependency on oil importation.

Keywords

corruption, unemployment, oil bunkering, environmental pollution, niger delta

Introduction

Nigeria was once a land of great hope and progress, a nation with immense resources at its disposal—natural resources, yes, but even more so, human resources (Achebe, 2012). Unfortunately, corruption has changed the course of Nigeria. Corruption is either grand, petty or political depending on the measure of money which have been lost along with the sector at hand (Abdulrasheed, 2018; Ebeh, 2015; Transparency International, 2020). According to Schoeberlein & Jenkins (2019), grand corruption involves huge sums of money and this involves senior state officials and politicians while petty corruption involves custom officials (Sule-Dan & Godwin Ilesanmi, 2015), policemen (Adebayo & Ojo, 2009), and messengers or clerical staff that demand for gratification before services could be rendered, such as a mere movement of files from one point or the other (Osoba, 1996). Whether corruption is grand or petty, it has catastrophic impact on the peoples' socio-economic status and quality of life (Ogbeidi, 2012). In one of his keynote addresses, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, defined corruption as (Obasanjo, 1994):

...the misuse of public power for private and personal benefit... it is usually carried out in utmost secrecy... (such that) the act itself may not be immediately perceptible. More significantly, there is no direct obvious victim to complain of corruption and to help provide evidence. The victim is more often than not, the public at large. In effect, successful prosecution is usually more problematic (Nuhu, 2018).

Corruption is the root cause of Nigeria's unemployment and underdevelopment (Aloko & Abdullahi, 2018),

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conflicts and poverty ([Farouk, Musa, Ainuddin, Lee, & Abdullah, 2016](#)), pipeline vandalism and militancy ([Tukur Umar & Hajj Othman, 2017](#)), armed banditry ([J. S. Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023](#)), kidnapping and terrorism ([Agbaje, 2022](#)). The nation's infrastructure-rail lines, roads, power generation and distribution, ports and other basic amenities are in chronic deficits; the health sector is also problematic giving rise to what is generally referred to as the phenomenon of "medical tourism" ([Abubakar et al., 2018](#)), the education sector is equally not given the attention it deserves hence leading to brain drain ([Mba & Ekeopara, 2012](#)) and academic bankruptcy ([Umar & Tubosun, 2016](#)). Obviously, the nation is not on the path to progress, thus leaving the young people hopelessly jobless.

Unemployment has become a serious cankerworm sweeping through the Nigerian society. It is seen as one of the greatest weapon of mass destruction used by the government against her youth populace. It has led many youths to crime and criminality, destroyed homes and relationships, crippled economic and social growth, thus, resulting to socio-economic and political strangulation because it is a deliberate strategy to monopolize power as the government is not taking concrete steps towards its eradication ([O. S. Ojo, Odetunde, & Mustapha, 2022](#)). Undoubtedly, Nigerian politicians are aware that when jobs are created no youths would want to be used by them as sacred cow to achieve their selfish political ambitions ([State, Olarewaju, & Agboola, 2014](#)).

Every year, hundreds of institutions graduate millions of young people in various fields. Unfortunately, only a privilege few become gainfully employed, empowered and economically independent in their chosen careers whereas the majority, endlessly roam about the streets seeking for jobs that do not exist and at the same time require years of experience which the new graduates do not have; while others remain parasites to their family members and friends.

Accordingly, [Abdulrasheed \(2018\)](#) noted that: Unemployment of the educated is gone to a level beyond management. Eight (8) out of every ten (10) higher education graduates are unemployed turning education into investment in frustration. The very few who get jobs do so through "Imammadu", social connection, tribalism, and favoritisms. Consequently, merit is dethroned giving way for mediocrity. As a result of corruption people get jobs without application and or interviews while at home. Sadly, those who pass through due processes of recruitment, selection and are found appointable are rejected because they do not have sponsors or "godfathers".

Sadly, with the unfavourable government policies in line with high banking interest rate, those with the spirit and zeal of entrepreneur are discouraged since they cannot access loans thereby widening the gap of the country's jobless population and potential agents for social and environmental catastrophe. An idle mind they say is a veritable tool for evil schemes. Since man has to put the body and soul together, he must do something to satisfy his immediate needs and desires, ambitions and aspirations. To gain these satisfaction/needs, man has to empower himself in the best and cheapest means possible.

Today, illegal oil exploration and exploitation otherwise known as oil bunkering or "kpofire", has become the order of the day, hence, an easy way out of joblessness. It is one of the most financially profitable enterprise that requires little or no experience but physical ability to earn much. This illegal oil activity is very common among the youths of the Nigerian's Niger Delta region with states like Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Abia and Imo taking the lead. Despite the dangers associated with this economic sabotage, many young people still engage themselves in it. In 2020, illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta was reported to have taken off the streets over eleven thousand (11,000) young people and supplies their products to over 60% of filling stations across the country ([Nzeneri, 2021](#)). According to an Africa Independent Television (AIT) interview report in 2021, a lady who employ some of these youths in her illegal dump (refinery) noted that ([An Africa Independent Television \(AIT\), 2021](#)):

I have about 50 persons working for me and none earns less than N4,000.00 per day ...there are over 30 dump sites in Bayelsa State alone and so it is across the region ...the success of this business is largely dependent on our co-operation and mutual understanding with government agencies ...in as much as our activities are injurious to human and environmental health, I plead to government to give us legal backing to enable us adopt more safety measures, better and environmentally friendly approaches and to help government reduce dependency on importation of crude products and increase national revenue by paying our taxes.

Figure 1. Illegal Oil activities in the Niger Delta



The implications of these illegal activities are highly enormous. It leads to environmental pollution and degradation, destruction of biodiversity and economic loss. According to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Group Managing Director (GMD) Melle Kolo Kyari, Nigeria losses over 200million barrels of crude to pipeline vandalism monthly amounting to millions of dollars. Not until January 2022, after the Rivers State Governor Barr. Nyesom Wike in his New Year broadcast message announced and ordered for the immediate arrest of persons involved in illegal oil activities in the state, residents of Port Harcourt City and its environs for over four (4) years witness soot and sometimes tick black fog that beclouds visibility ([BBC News, 2022](#)).

According to medical experts, the soot is capable of causing cancer, respiratory and other health related problems. Presently, Port Harcourt City and its environs is free of soot because the Governor matched his words with action by setting up a formidable taskforce team against illegal oil activities in the state. There is still more to be done in creating jobs in order to absolve this group of persons that have been displaced and other jobless persons in other to avoid high rate of crime and other social vices in the state. The study survey was able to gather that majority of the people involved in this illegal oil activities are graduates and bread winners who have struggled for years seeking for genuine means of livelihood. It is in view of the above that this study examined corruption as a contributing factor to unemployment and environmental pollution in Nigeria and the way forward for a sustainable progressive nation.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive research design, as articulated by [Nzeneri \(2021\)](#), to interpret current phenomena within the Niger Delta's illegal oil dump sites, including existing conditions, relationships, opinions, and effects. The targeted population comprises both past and present employees of these sites, encompassing dump owners, distillers, tanker drivers/transporters, and informants. From the total LGAs in Bayelsa (8) and Rivers (23) states, a systematic random sampling technique yielded a selection of three LGAs from Bayelsa and seven from Rivers. Within these chosen LGAs, two dump sites were randomly selected from each, amounting to 20 sites. From each site, 10 respondents were selected, culminating in 200 respondents. Data collection hinged on a structured questionnaire crafted by the researcher. This instrument comprised two sections: Section A, highlighting socio-demographic data, and Section B, delving into questions about unemployment and environmental pollution. With 3 demographic items, 10 unemployment-related items, and 8 environmental pollution items, respondents marked their answers on a four-point Likert scale. The questionnaire's reliability coefficients were .69 for the unemployment section and .73 for the environmental pollution section, as ascertained through a test-retest method. Post-data collection, mean ratings addressed research questions, and hypotheses were assessed using independent t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at a 0.05 significance threshold. The study sought to discern if there were significant differences in unemployment perceptions based on gender and if these

perceptions varied based on years of experience in relation to environmental pollution.

Results

Out of a total population of 200 (100%) participants that were sampled, 116 (58.0%) of them were male while 84 (42%) were female. Equally, 37 (18.5%) of the respondents were within 0-2 years of experience, 92 (46%) were within 3-4 years of experience while 71 (35.5%) were within 5 years and above as illegal oil operators. Finally, 53 (24%) were former operators while 147 (76%) were still very active. Descriptive statistics of mean rating were used to answer research questions while Hypotheses postulated were tested using independent t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question One: What are the perceived factors of unemployment in the Niger Delta?

Since the questionnaire items were structured in a four-response-type, a cut-off score of 2.50 was used as the baseline for determining participants' responses. Therefore, items found with mean scores equal or above 2.50 were perceived factors of unemployment while items with mean scores below 2.50 were remarked otherwise.

Table 1. Mean and Rank Order of The Respondents Perceived Factors of Unemployment in the Niger Delta

S/N	Factors of Unemployment	Mean	Rank	Remarks
1	High level of corruption on the part of political leaders and those in public offices	3.72	1 st	Affirmed
2	Lack of enabling environments for businesses to thrive (inadequate power supply, multiple taxation etc.)	3.57	2 nd	“
3	Lack of quality assurance in the implementation of government policies.	3.46	3 rd	“
4	Absence of improved linkage and synergy between the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the private sector	3.41	4 th	“
5	Lack of government acceptance of young people as her greatest assets for national development	3.38	5 th	“
6	Absence of national descriptive framework to support young entrepreneurs.	3.21	6 th	“
7	Lack of government commitment and willingness in creating job opportunities.	3.20	7 th	“
8	Poor/inadequate fund to support young people with creative ideas.	3.01	8 th	“
9	High level of social, political, cultural, religious and tribal sentimental influences	2.96	9 th	“
10	Age limit and years of experience required for employment	2.95	10 th	“

As revealed in Table 1, the mean score of all the items are above 2.50. This implies that the factors of unemployment as stated above were all pertinent/critical as perceived by the respondents. The most obvious factor was high level of corruption in the county.

Research Question Two: What are the perceived unemployment indices that promote environmental pollution?

Table 2. Mean and Rank Order of the Respondents Perceived Unemployment Indices of Environmental Pollution

S/N	Factors of Unemployment	Mean	Rank	Remark
1	Crude oil theft and its local distillation process is the major course of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta region.	3.71	1 st	Affirmed
2	Illegal oil activities degenerate environmental health especially the atmospheric environment.	3.52	2 nd	“
3	Given the opportunity for a legitimate job even with less pays, many will quit illegal oil activities.	3.43	3 rd	“
4	The black soot experienced in some parts of Rivers State was as a result of illegal oil activities	3.42	4 th	“

S/N	Factors of Unemployment	Mean	Rank	Remark
5	Unemployment have pushed many young people into illicit/illegitimate activities that are injurious to the environment.	3.41	5 th	“
6	Government should legalize and support local distillation of crude with modular refineries to reduce unemployment and environmental pollution.	2.61	6 th	“
7	It is perceived that the survival of humans must be guaranteed first before anyone can talk of environmental sustainability.	2.51	7 th	“
8	The Taskforce Setup by The Rivers State government on illegal oil activities will permanently bring to an end this illegitimate activity and reduce environmental pollution.	2.01	8 th	Negative

As revealed in Table 2, the mean score of all the items except one are above 2.50. This shows that if proper and adequate steps are taken, environmental pollution occasioned by illegal oil activities can be totally eradicated. The most apparent unemployment indices to environmental pollution by the respondents was the theft and local distillation of crude oil. There is a strong believe that the taskforce setup by the Rivers State government will not bring lasting solution to illegal oil activities neither will it eradicate environmental pollution in the region.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses One: There is no significant difference on the perceived factors of unemployment based on Gender.

Table 3. T-test Statistics Showing the Influence in the Perceived Factors of Unemployment Based on Gender

Gender	No	Mean	S.D	Df	t-value	Signif.	RK
Male	116	17.275	3.454	198	1.642	0.12	NS
Female	84	16.821	3.409				

* Insignificance at $P > 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the t-value of 1.642 was obtained with a p-value of 0.12 computed at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.12 is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis one is retained. Therefore, there is no statically significant difference in the perceived factors of unemployment in the region based on gender.

Hypotheses Two: There is no significant difference in the perceived unemployment indices that promote environmental pollution based on years of experience.

Table 4. Analysis of Variance of the Difference in the Perceived Unemployment Indices That Promote Environmental Pollution Based on Years of Experience

Variables	Sum of squares	Df	Mean sqature	F	Signif.	RK
Between Groups	241.242	2	120.621			
Within Groups	21644.241	197	109.869	1.098	0.63	NS
Total	21885.483	39				

* Insignificance at $P > 0.05$

Table 4 reveals the F-value of 1.098 with a P-value of 0.63 computed at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.63 obtained is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis two is retained. This means, that there is no statistically significant difference in the perceived unemployment indices that promote environmental pollution based on years of experience.

Discussion

From the findings of this study as revealed in Table 1, all the factors of unemployment in Nigeria as stated in the instrument were affirmed as perceived by the respondents. The most challenging factor was high level of corruption on the part of political leaders and those in public offices. To change the narrative in this regard, the county will need fearless, compassionate and selfless democrats in positions of authority

especially in the law enforcement agencies such as the Police, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Judiciary etc. In order to fight the scourge of corruption and ensure all round sustainable growth and development, leaders must see the citizenry as the nation's greatest asset and map out strategies on how to meaningfully and productively engage many. The citizens on the other hand should not solely rely on government. Instead, all hands must be on deck because we need the creativity, enterprise and scholarship of all our people and should always demand for good stewardship from those in authority. This finding agrees with the notion of Dr. Robert when she stated on a television programme that: "of all the problems of this country, the most challenges is corruption in leadership ...young people should speak out using every machinery at their disposal. To rebuild hope in the young people, this corrupt generation of political leaders and politicians should be removed with our votes ([Oluwasanu et al., 2023](#)). It equally agrees with the statement of ([Abdulrasheed, 2018](#)) that the corrupt nature and unpatriotic tendency of an average Nigeria politician hinder foreign investment and partnership.

Within the vast expanse of the Niger Delta, where the intertwining rivers meet the green lands, the question of unemployment looms large. To understand the root causes, the research delved into the perceived factors of unemployment in this region, utilizing a meticulously crafted questionnaire. Each question was designed with a score, where anything above 2.50 meant the factor was significant in the eyes of the participants. The results painted a picture as vast as the delta itself. Every single factor listed scored above the threshold, illuminating a myriad of challenges the region faces. But one factor shone brighter than the rest: corruption. Corruption, like a dense fog, was perceived to be enveloping the area, hindering progress, and suppressing opportunities. This isn't just a statistic; it's a cry from the heart of the Niger Delta, where the citizens feel shackled by the chains of graft and deceit.

Transitioning from unemployment, the research sailed into murkier waters: the environmental aftermath of unemployment in the delta. What footprints do the unemployed leave on the pristine environment of the region? The questionnaire sought to unravel this. As the data was analyzed, it became evident that most of the unemployment indices had a strong connection to environmental degradation. Theft and local distillation of crude oil, for instance, emerged as dark specters casting shadows on the land. These activities, born out of desperation and the struggle for survival, are inadvertently poisoning the very lands and waters the community depends upon.

However, amidst these glaring statistics lay an undercurrent of skepticism. Many respondents voiced doubts about the taskforce formed by the Rivers State government. Rather than viewing it as a beacon of hope, they saw it as perhaps another transient attempt, likely to dissolve like the mist over the delta without bringing about real change. While the numbers and statistics form the skeleton of this research, the soul lies in the collective voice of the Niger Delta. A voice yearning for change, for clarity amidst the corruption, and for solutions that echo the beauty and complexity of the delta itself.

The findings of the study also indicate that crude oil theft and its local distillation process is the major course of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. It advocated for support and legalization of local crude refining with modular refineries to reduce unemployment and environmental pollution. Obviously, many of the respondents were of the opinion that if given the opportunity for a legitimate job, they will happily quit the illegally dangerous activity. This study equally revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceived factors of unemployment in Nigeria based on gender. Finally, the study reported as part of its findings that there is no statistically significant difference in the perceived unemployment indices that promote environmental pollution based on years of experience in illegal oil activities.

Conclusion

Corruption does not only contribute to unemployment and environmental pollution in the Niger Delta region. It plays a leading role in crime and criminality such as pipeline vandalization, militancy, oil theft and its distillation, violence and conflicts to mention a few. These acts of hostility pollute the business environment and cripples socio-economic activities. It therefore becomes very imperative for governments at all levels to rekindle hope in the young populace by changing the narrative through strengthening her legal instruments against corruption, creating job opportunities and granting substantial soft loans to those young people who want to be self-employed so as to reduce high level of unemployment

and to promote national peace, growth and development.

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