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COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE AND POLICY EFFECTIVENESS IN MANAGING OIL POLLUTION IN BAYELSA STATE

Orji Kingsley Chibuzor[1] & Roy Nwaudo Umejuru[2]

[1]*Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt Rivers State*

Email: kingsley.orji@iaue.edu.ng

[2]*Department Health and safety Environment, Total Energies Nigeria*

Umeroy92@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examined community perception on institutional response and policy effectiveness in managing oil pollution in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Two (2) objectives and two (2) research questions were posed for the study while descriptive survey design was adopted. A total of 210 respondents were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, three oil-impacted local government areas—Ekeremor, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa - were purposively selected based on their exposure to oil spill incidents. In the second stage, five communities were randomly chosen from each local government area, and respondents were proportionately drawn from different occupational categories including farmers, fishers, traders, civil servants, and traditional leaders. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Instrument for data collection was a self-constructed closed ended questionnaire titled Community Perception of Institutional Response and Policy Effectiveness in Managing Oil Pollution Questionnaire (CPIRPEMOPQ)." The instrument was validated by the two experts in the Department of Geography and Environmental Management and the reliability of 0.86 was established using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient. Findings revealed that institutional and corporate responses were largely ineffective, characterized by delayed cleanup, inadequate remediation, poor compensation, and limited community participation and weak institutional capacity, fragmented and poorly coordinated governance structures, it also revealed that; corruption and weak accountability, political interference and elite capture, inadequate funding and resource misallocation and weak monitoring as possible factors that limit policy implementation among other findings. The study concludes that systemic failures, stemming from weak coordination, political interference, and insufficient enforcement, undermine effective oil pollution management. It recommends strengthening institutional autonomy, improving inter-agency collaboration, and promoting community-inclusive environmental governance to achieve sustainable remediation and ecological restoration in Nigeria's oil-producing regions.

Keywords: Oil pollution, institutional response, environmental governance, Niger Delta, community participation, remediation, inter-agency coordination.

Introduction

The discovery of crude oil in Nigeria brought immense economic opportunities but also profound environmental and social challenges, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Bayelsa State, one of the major oil-producing areas, has witnessed extensive environmental degradation resulting from oil spills, gas flaring, and related industrial activities. Despite the presence of various government agencies and environmental laws intended to manage and mitigate the effects of oil pollution, the region continues to experience recurrent spills, poor remediation, and persistent ecological damage. This situation underscores the critical question of institutional response and policy effectiveness in managing environmental crises arising from oil exploration.

Nigeria's institutional framework for oil pollution management includes agencies such as the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). These institutions are mandated to monitor oil production activities, enforce environmental standards, and oversee remediation processes. However, evidence suggests that their performance has been undermined by overlapping functions, poor funding, political interference, and weak enforcement capacity (Nriagu, 2011). As a result, oil companies often operate with minimal accountability, and remediation processes are frequently delayed or executed without community involvement. Obi (2010) notes that these institutional deficiencies have created a governance vacuum that allows pollution to persist while affected communities continue to suffer.

Corporate responses have also been inadequate. Although oil companies such as Shell, Agip, and Chevron have implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, many of these programs are reactive and poorly aligned with the long-term environmental needs of the host communities (Egbe & Thompson, 2010). Amangabara and Njoku (2012) further observe that cleanup exercises are often superficial, aimed more at fulfilling regulatory requirements than achieving ecological restoration. Consequently, the affected populations remain vulnerable to poverty, food insecurity, and health risks.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine community perception of institutional response and policy effectiveness in managing oil pollution in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1) Assess the effectiveness of institutional and corporate response mechanisms in Bayelsa State.
2) Identify the possible systemic weaknesses that limit policy implementation in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study;

1) What is the effectiveness of institutional and corporate response mechanisms in Bayelsa State.?
2) What are the systemic weaknesses that limit policy implementation in Bayelsa State?

Literature Review

Oil Pollution

Oil pollution is the incessant release of crude oil or refined petroleum products directly into the natural environment in quantity that negatively affect ecological systems, public health,

and socio-economic activities (Nwilo & Badejo, 2005). It ranges from accidental spills, operational discharges, leakages, pipeline vandalism, artisanal refining activities to improper waste disposal from oil exploration and production processes. Niger Delta region, and particularly in Bayelsa State, oil pollution has become a protracted environmental problem due to the long history of oil production, aging infrastructure, and limited regulatory oversight (UNEP, 2020).

The major sources of oil pollution in Bayelsa State include pipeline corrosion, equipment failure, operational mishaps, sabotage, illegal bunkering, and artisanal crude oil refining. NOSDRA (2021) reported that a significant proportion of spills in the region result from aging pipelines and poor maintenance regimes by oil companies. These pipelines, many of which have been in use for over three decades, are prone to ruptures that release large quantities of hydrocarbons into surrounding environments. Similarly, Chiluwa and Odebunmi (2022) averred that the prevalence of artisanal refining especially in riverine communities further contributes heavily to localized spills, soot emissions, and residue dumping that degrade water and soil quality

Oil pollution has far-reaching environmental consequences. Hydrocarbon contamination affects soil fertility, leading to reduced agricultural productivity and the loss of arable land. According to Kadafa (2020) crude oil alters soil chemical composition, impeding plant growth and resulting in long-term ecological imbalance.

Institutional Response

The term "institutional response" describes the coordinated systems, policies, and activities put in place by governmental, regulatory, and organizational institutions to prevent, identify, control, and address environmental issues like oil pollution. In order to protect the environment and promote public welfare, it includes the legislative framework, regulatory enforcement, interagency cooperation, disaster planning, and remediation processes (Adebayo et al., 2022).

In the framework of oil pollution, institutional response involves the collective roles of institutions such as environmental regulatory bodies, oil-spill monitoring agencies, and governmental ministries responsible for ecological protection. These institutions develop and enforce laws, conduct surveillance, implement mitigation strategies, and coordinate response activities when pollution occurs. According to Okonkwo and Afolabi (2021) in Nigeria, for example, institutions such as the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), the Ministry of Environment, and the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) are mandated to undertake detection, containment, clean-up, and post-spill remediation.

Developing backup plans, carrying out risk assessments, preserving technical capability, and guaranteeing the quick deployment of staff and equipment during spill disasters are all essential components of an efficient institutional response. According to Nwankwo and Chukwu (2023), institutions are essential for keeping an eye on communities that produce oil, enforcing environmental laws, and making sure that oil firms abide by global norms like the Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Cooperation Convention (OPRC).

Despite this structure, institutional action in many developing environments is still hampered by political meddling, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, overlapping institutional

missions, and limited resources. Research indicates that the overall efficacy of institutional measures is frequently undermined by inadequate monitoring technologies, poor regulatory independence, and delays in cleanup operations (Eze & Nnemeka, 2024). These shortcomings may lead to persistent pollution incidents, long-term environmental deterioration, and the loss of livelihoods for people who depend on natural resources.

Oil Pollution Management

In Nigeria has long been a major environmental and governance challenge, particularly in the Niger Delta where most of the country's petroleum exploration and production take place. The region, which includes Bayelsa State, has experienced severe ecological damage due to frequent oil spills, gas flaring, and industrial waste discharge. Approximately 9,000 oil-spill accidents were reported in the Niger Delta between 1976 and 2005, releasing approximately 3.1 million barrels of crude oil into marshes, rivers, and farmlands; nearly 70% of the spilled oil was not recovered (Onuoha, 2021). The lives of populations that rely on farming and fishing have been jeopardized by these spills, which have seriously disturbed ecological systems. Despite the establishment of a number of organizations and policy frameworks to combat oil pollution, their efficacy is still restricted because of inadequate coordination, poor governance, and a lack of accountability (Eze & Nnemeka, 2024).

The Nigerian government's institutional framework for oil pollution management includes agencies such as the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The DPR, established under the Petroleum Act of 1969, is tasked with supervising oil exploration and ensuring adherence to operational and environmental standards. NOSDRA, created in 2006, is responsible for oil spill detection, response coordination, and remediation, while the NDDC was designed to promote development in oil-producing communities. However, despite the presence of these agencies, environmental degradation persists. According to Nriagu (2011), the failure of these institutions lies not in their establishment but in their operational inefficiency, political interference, and overlapping mandates, which create confusion and duplication of responsibilities.

Scholars have consistently observed that institutional responses to oil pollution in Nigeria are often reactive and poorly coordinated. Obi (2010) asserts that weak regulatory oversight and political compromise allow multinational oil corporations to evade accountability for environmental violations. Many government officials are alleged to have close ties with oil companies, which undermines the objectivity of environmental monitoring. Bamidele (2012) adds that most institutional actions focus on temporary mitigation rather than long-term ecological restoration. Cleanup exercises are frequently delayed or incomplete, while compensation processes are riddled with corruption and lack transparency. This inefficiency not only perpetuates pollution but also deepens the distrust between host communities, oil companies, and government agencies.

Corporate institutions, particularly oil companies such as Shell, Agip, and Chevron, have also been criticized for inadequate responses to environmental degradation. Although many of these companies claim adherence to international environmental standards and have introduced

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, such initiatives often fail to address the underlying causes of pollution. Egbe and Thompson (2010) argue that CSR in the Niger Delta tends to be symbolic—focused on community donations or infrastructure projects rather than meaningful environmental remediation. Uzo (2014) supports this by noting that most remediation efforts are superficial, leaving hydrocarbon residues in the soil and water long after official cleanup exercises are declared complete. Furthermore, corporate negligence and cost-cutting practices contribute significantly to equipment failure and pipeline corrosion, which are leading causes of oil spills in Bayelsa State.

Systemic weaknesses that limit policy implementation

Institutional capability, political commitment, coordination, accountability, and sufficient funding are all necessary for the successful implementation of policies. However, many governance systems, particularly those in developing nations like Nigeria, have serious structural flaws that make it difficult to translate policy objectives into actual results, according to Ayee (2016). According to Oluwole and Okotoni (2018), the following elements impede the application of policies: Weak Institutional capacity, fragmented and poorly coordinated governance structures, political interference and elite capture, political interference and elite capture, corruption and weak accountability, inadequate funding and resource misallocation, weak monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems and low stakeholder engagement and resistance from communities

Weak Institutional Capacity: The implementation agencies' low technical, financial, and human competence is a recurring obstacle. Institutions are unable to efficiently implement programs or enforce rules when they lack operational cash, current equipment, and skilled personnel. According to several researches, one of the best indicators of implementation failure is a lack of bureaucratic ability (Ayee, 2016).

Fragmented and Poorly Coordinated Governance Structures: Ministries, local governments, and regulatory agencies must work together on many policies. According to Oluwole and Okotoni (2018), fragmented structures that result in agencies operating in silos or having overlapping mandates cause duplication, inconsistencies, and delays. Inadequate coordination both vertically and horizontally limits the effectiveness of implementation.

Political Interference and Elite Capture: According to Musa and Hassan (2020), political dynamics often compromise the continuity and integrity of policies. Elite capture, patronage networks, and frequent leadership changes distort policy execution, moving it away from intended beneficiaries.

Corruption and Weak Accountability: Corruption distorts procurement, diverts resources, and erodes public confidence. Corrupt practices can proliferate due to inadequate oversight and enforcement procedures, which weaken implementation ability (Oluwole & Okotoni, 2018). Rent-seeking and inefficiency persist where accountability systems are inadequate.

Inadequate Funding and Resource Misallocation: When governments are unable to provide sufficient and timely funds, even well-designed initiatives fail. Implementation is hampered by politically motivated resource allocation, inadequate financial planning, and budget delays (Ayee,

2016). Agencies are unable to maintain necessary infrastructure or program operations without consistent financing.

Weak Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Systems: Leak detection systems and fiber-optic sensors are examples of real-time monitoring technologies that are rarely used. Regulatory bodies don't have current databases to monitor spills and the status of remediation. As a result, underreporting occurs and contaminated sites continue to exist (UNEP, 2011).

Low Stakeholder Engagement and Resistance from Communities: Policies implemented without adequate consultation often encounter resistance, misunderstanding, or non-cooperation. Weak community participation reduces legitimacy and ownership, particularly in sectors like environmental management and public health (Musa & Hassan, 2020).

Empirical evidence supports these criticisms. Amangabara and Njoku (2012) found that government and corporate responses to oil spills in Rivers and Bayelsa States were characterized by delay, lack of community involvement, and insufficient funding. Their study revealed that the absence of a transparent monitoring system encourages underreporting of spills, thereby reducing the scale of official response. Similarly, Anyanwu, Dawi-Waadu, Tanee, and Ocbekwu (2014) discovered that institutional inefficiency and corruption have eroded public trust in environmental agencies, while affected communities perceive government interventions as biased toward corporate interests. Nwilo (2001) further identifies lack of modern technology, weak enforcement mechanisms, and inadequate training of personnel as major barriers to effective oil spill 2management. UNEP (2011) conducted study on environmental assessment of Ogoniland. The aim was to assess the extent of oil contamination in Ogoniland and evaluate institutional capacity for pollution management. The study employed large-scale environmental assessment involving field sampling, laboratory analysis, and institutional review. The result of the study revealed that regulatory agencies lacked resources, equipment, and enforcement capacity, overlapping mandates and weak coordination undermined response. Based on the findings of the study it concluded that systemic institutional weaknesses not just technical failures were central to poor implementation of oil pollution policies.

Similarly, Zabbey, Sam and Vincent-Akpu (2024) conducted a study on socio-economic baseline for oil-impacted communities in Ogoniland. The aim was to generate a socio-economic baseline to guide oil spill restoration in Ogoniland and assess governance gaps affecting implementation. The study employed Mixed-method study combining household surveys, focus group discussions, and institutional analysis. The result of the study revealed that weak governance structures and political interference hindered remediation, agencies lacked autonomous decision-making power, leading to delays and community distrust and poor communication weakened cooperation. Based on the findings of the study it concluded that successful remediation requires strengthening institutions, ensuring transparency, and involving communities meaningfully.

Musa and Hassan (2020) conducted a study on Institutional Weaknesses in Nigeria's Environmental Management. The aim of the study was to examine how institutional deficiencies affect implementation of environmental policies, including oil spill management. The study adopted Mixed-methods research involving surveys and interviews across federal and state

environmental agencies. The result of the study revealed that severe capacity deficits, poor coordination, and political interference hindered pollution control and corruption and bureaucratic delays weakened monitoring and enforcement. It concluded that structural weaknesses in Nigeria's environmental governance architecture significantly limit the effective implementation of oil spill policies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this study is derived from Institutional Theory. The theory was propounded by John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan in 1977. It states that the behavior of organizations and institutions is largely shaped by the rules, norms, and cultural expectations of their external environment rather than purely by efficiency or technical considerations. Put differently as, organizations adopt certain structures, policies, or practices because they are expected, legitimate, or socially accepted, not just because they are the most efficient. Scott (2014) averred that institutions consist of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars that guide organizational behavior.

The theory offers an appropriate framework for analyzing how Bayelsa State's government agencies, regulatory bodies, oil firms, and community stakeholders react to oil contamination. The idea helps explain not just what institutions are supposed to accomplish but also why they could be successful or unsuccessful in controlling pollution. It clarifies why certain organizations may implement environmental regulations in theory but not in reality, leading to inadequate enforcement, inefficient responses, or delayed clean-ups.

Additionally, rather than achieving actual environmental preservation, institutions in Bayelsa State may adopt visible but occasionally ineffectual measures simply to seek legitimacy from communities, NGOs, and international observers. It explains how political meddling, overlapping mandates, and institutional fragmentation reduce the efficacy of oil spill management policies. The theory is crucial to this research because it clarifies how institutional structures and regulations influence the environmental response practices of Bayelsa State agencies. It also sheds light on the reasons behind the success or failure of oil-pollution regulations, particularly when it comes to institutional flaws or symbolic compliance. It draws attention to how external pressures; legal, political, and social affect the execution of policies. It provides a lens through which to examine institutional cooperation, which is crucial for handling emergencies involving oil pollution.

Therefore, existing literature underscores that both governmental and corporate institutions have fallen short in managing oil pollution in the Niger Delta. Weak enforcement, political interference, corruption, and lack of community inclusion have rendered policies largely ineffective. While significant legal and institutional frameworks exist, their implementation remains inconsistent and poorly monitored. This study therefore extends the discourse by empirically evaluating how these institutional and corporate structures function in Bayelsa State, identifying practical gaps in policy execution, and proposing strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of environmental governance mechanisms in managing oil pollution sustainably.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to evaluate community perception of institutional response and policy effectiveness in managing oil pollution in Bayelsa State. The design was chosen because it allows for systematic assessment of opinions, perceptions, and experiences of respondents regarding institutional and corporate interventions without manipulating any variables. Bayelsa State, one of the core oil-producing areas of Nigeria, was selected as the study area due to its long history of environmental degradation and the concentration of oil production facilities operated by major multinational companies such as Shell, Agip, and Chevron.

A total of 210 respondents were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, three oil-impacted local government areas—Ekeremor, Southern Ijaw, and Yenagoa—were purposively selected based on their exposure to oil spill incidents. In the second stage, five communities were randomly chosen from each local government area, and respondents were proportionately drawn from different occupational categories including farmers, fishers, traders, civil servants, and traditional leaders. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions covering themes such as policy awareness, institutional efficiency, response time, remediation effectiveness, and community involvement. The research instrument was validated by environmental management experts, while a pilot study conducted in two communities yielded a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86, confirming its internal consistency.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and mean scores were used to summarize responses. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed to ensure research integrity and the protection of participants' rights.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results of the study on community perception of institutional response and policy effectiveness in managing oil pollution in Bayelsa State. The findings are based on data collected from 210 respondents, including community members, local leaders, environmental officers, and corporate representatives. Descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted to evaluate the performance of government institutions and oil companies in addressing oil pollution and its socio-environmental impacts.

Table 1: Respondents' Perception of the Frequency of Institutional Response to Oil Spills

Response Frequency	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Immediate response	18	8.6
Within one week	35	16.7
Within one month	71	33.8
After several months	59	28.1
No response	27	12.8

The data indicate that institutional responses to oil spills are generally delayed. Only 8.6% of respondents reported an immediate response, while 61.9% observed that cleanup operations occur after a month or longer. This delay exacerbates the extent of environmental damage and economic losses suffered by affected communities. These findings are consistent with Amangabara and Njoku (2012), who observed that cleanup and compensation processes in oil-impacted communities are often reactive and insufficiently coordinated.

Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Institutional and Corporate Response Mechanisms

Performance Indicators	Mean Score	Remark
Promptness of response	2.38	Ineffective
Adequacy of cleanup operations	2.54	Ineffective
Fairness of compensation	2.21	Ineffective
Community participation	2.46	Ineffective
Transparency in operations	2.32	Ineffective
Monitoring and evaluation	2.58	Ineffective
Average Mean = 2.42		Ineffective

Based on the mean score benchmark of 3.0, the results in Table 2 show that all indicators of institutional and corporate performance fall below the acceptable threshold. The overall average mean of 2.42 implies that both government agencies and oil companies are largely ineffective in their management of oil pollution. Respondents expressed concern that cleanup operations are often poorly executed, with minimal follow-up monitoring. This supports the view of Nriagu (2011), who argued that institutional inefficiency and corruption have weakened the enforcement of environmental laws in Nigeria. Similarly, Obi (2010) and Bamidele (2012) found that environmental governance in the Niger Delta is hindered by overlapping mandates, political interference, and lack of accountability.

Table 3: Possible systemic weaknesses that limit policy implementation

Performance Indicators	Mean Score	Remark
Weak institutional capacity	3.01	Agreed
Fragmented and poorly coordinated governance structures	2.70	Agreed
Corruption and weak accountability	2.91	Agreed
Political interference and elite capture	3.16	Agreed
Inadequate funding and resource misallocation	3.12	Agreed
Weak monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems	3.08	Agreed
Average Mean = 2.99		**Agreed**

Based on the mean score benchmark of 3.0, the results in Table 3 show that all indicators of possible systemic weaknesses that limit policy implementation which are; weak institutional capacity, fragmented and poorly coordinated governance structures, corruption and weak accountability, political interference and elite capture, inadequate funding and resource misallocation and weak monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems are above the acceptable threshold. The overall average mean of 2.99 implies that respondents agreed on systemic weaknesses that limit policy implementation. This agrees with Ayee (2016) that weak institutional capacity is one of the best indicators of implementation. The result supports United Nation Environmental Program UNEP (2011) that regulatory bodies do not have current databases to monitor spills and the status of remediation. As a result, underreporting occurs and contaminated sites continue to exist. Similarly, the result is in tandem with the assertion of Oluwole and Okotoni (2018) that corruption distorts procurement, diverts resources, and erodes public confidence.

Qualitative interview responses reinforced these quantitative findings. Community leaders lamented that regulatory agencies such as NOSDRA and DPR often visit spill sites only after significant pressure from the public or media. Several respondents claimed that cleanup operations are mostly cosmetic and fail to restore the environment to its pre-spill condition. Furthermore, compensation processes are characterized by bureaucratic delays and underpayment. These responses align with the assertions of Egbe and Thompson (2010), who noted that oil companies' CSR interventions often serve public relations purposes rather than addressing the environmental and economic realities of host communities.

The findings also show that inter-agency coordination remains weak. NOSDRA, DPR, and NDDC operate in isolation, leading to duplication of functions and inefficient resource use. According to Uzo (2014), such institutional fragmentation has hindered effective disaster response and long-term policy sustainability. Moreover, weak funding, inadequate technical capacity, and political interference have limited agencies' ability to enforce environmental laws. As a result, oil companies continue to externalize the costs of pollution to host communities while avoiding meaningful accountability.

The results of this study reveal a systemic failure in institutional and corporate mechanisms for managing oil pollution in Bayelsa State. Both government agencies and oil companies have not effectively fulfilled their environmental protection mandates. These findings highlight the urgent need for a coordinated, transparent, and community-inclusive approach to environmental governance in Nigeria's oil-producing regions. Strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring autonomy from political influence, and enforcing strict compliance mechanisms are essential steps toward sustainable pollution management and restoration of public trust.

Conclusion

The study revealed that institutional and corporate responses to oil pollution in Bayelsa State are largely ineffective, delayed, and poorly coordinated. The majority of respondents reported that cleanup and remediation activities often occur long after spills, aggravating environmental degradation and community hardship. These findings underscore a persistent disconnect between policy formulation and grassroots realities, suggesting that environmental

management in the region remains reactive rather than preventive. The inefficiencies observed in agencies such as NOSDRA, DPR, and NDDC compounded by weak inter-agency coordination, political interference, and inadequate resources—have perpetuated a cycle of neglect and mistrust. In conclusion, the study establishes that both governmental and corporate institutions have failed to provide timely, transparent, and accountable responses to oil pollution in Bayelsa State. For meaningful improvement, institutional frameworks must be restructured to enhance coordination, independence, and technical capacity.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the followings are recommended;

1) Policies should prioritize community involvement, enforce stricter environmental regulations, and ensure fair compensation and remediation practices.
2) A holistic and participatory governance model is essential to rebuild trust, protect livelihoods, and achieve sustainable environmental recovery in Nigeria's oil-producing regions.

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