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ENVIRONMENTAL INSECURITY AND MIGRATORY PATTERNS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Stanley Ebitare Boroh

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria

borohse@fuotuoche.edu.ng

Abstract

The Niger Delta region is known to be disproportionately impacted by environmental insecurities when compared to other parts of Nigeria. While a plethora of studies have traced environmental insecurities in the region to pollution arising from oil and gas exploration, it remains unclear how this problem has led to population displacements and human migration across the region. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the nexus between oil induced environmental insecurities and migratory patterns in the region. Relying on the Push-Pull theoretical framework as well as extensive review of secondary materials and primary data, the paper submits that oil spillages and gas flaring have created disincentives that undermine the capacity of communities to carryout their traditional livelihood activities such as fishing, farming and mangrove forest extraction. This has in turn reduced productivity causing a sharp decline in income for most rural households thereby necessitating out-migration as a means of securing alternative livelihoods elsewhere. The paper concludes that the rising trend in environmental migration if not checked, would negatively impact the growth of rural economies and stall the development of the region as a whole. The paper recommends strict adherence to environmental protection laws as well as rigorous drive to build capacity of local people on how to improve their livelihood systems in the face of rising environmental insecurities.

Keywords: Environmental Insecurity, Livelihoods, Migration, Niger Delta

Introduction

The Niger Delta region, located in the southern part of Nigeria, is known for its rich oil reserves, which have fueled economic growth but also led to environmental degradation and insecurity. The region has faced a range of environmental challenges, including oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and pollution of water sources, which have contributed to the displacement of communities and the loss of livelihoods.

According to the United Nations Development Programme's report on the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration and extraction has led to significant challenges for the local population (UNDP, 2011). The report highlights the complex relationship between environmental insecurity, displacement and loss of livelihoods,

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

emphasizing the impact of oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and water pollution on the local communities (UNDP, 2011).

Additionally, a study by the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) revealed that the environmental challenges in the Niger Delta have contributed to the migration of communities within the region and to other parts of Nigeria (ERA/FoEN, 2018). The study highlighted how the destruction of land and water sources, as well as the loss of traditional livelihoods, have forced many people to seek better living conditions elsewhere (ERA/FoEN, 2018).

Furthermore, according to a study by Nkwocha and Korieh (2017), environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta has led to increased poverty and social unrest, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the local population. The study highlighted that the lack of access to clean water, fertile land, and other basic resources has contributed to food insecurity and poor health outcomes among the affected communities. Moreover, the environmental degradation has also led to conflicts over land and resources, further displacing vulnerable populations and exacerbating social tensions.

Suffice to say that the impact of environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta region has been a major driver of migration especially out migration among the local population. Many communities have been forced to relocate due to the destruction of their land and water sources, as well as the loss of their traditional means of livelihood, such as farming and fishing. This has resulted in both internal displacement within the region and migration to other parts of Nigeria or even neighboring countries in search of better living conditions. As a result, this study seek to understand the migratory patterns of local population in the Niger Delta birthed from environmental insecurities in the region.

Objectives of the study

1. Explore the underlying factors driving migration among the local population in the Niger Delta region in response to environmental insecurities, including oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and water pollution.
2. Analyze the impact of environmental degradation and displacement on the livelihoods, health outcomes, and social dynamics of communities in the Niger Delta, with a focus

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

on understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with migration as a coping strategy.

Literature Review

Environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta region has been a significant driver of migratory patterns among the local population. The Niger Delta, located in Nigeria, is a region rich in natural resources such as oil and gas. However, the exploitation of these resources has led to severe environmental degradation, including oil spills, contamination of water sources, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity (Ibeakanma & Obi, 2017). These environmental challenges have had profound effects on the livelihoods of the people in the region, pushing many to migrate in search of better living conditions.

According to Konya and Nafu (2019), environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta has forced many people to leave their homes and seek refuge in other parts of the country or even across national borders. The degradation of the environment has had detrimental effects on agriculture, fishing, and other traditional livelihoods, leading to increased poverty and food insecurity among the local population. As a result, many have been compelled to migrate to urban centers in search of work and economic opportunities.

The impact of environmental insecurity on migratory patterns in the Niger Delta is further exacerbated by the unequal distribution of resources and benefits from oil extraction activities. The local communities in the Niger Delta often bear the brunt of environmental degradation, while the profits from oil production are enjoyed by multinational corporations and the Nigerian government (Ikelegbe, 2019). This has fueled feelings of marginalization and discontent among the local population, prompting many to leave the region in search of a better life.

In addition to internal migration, environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta has also led to cross-border migration, with people seeking refuge in neighboring countries such as Benin and Cameroon (Olaniyan, 2018). This has created complex challenges for migration management and border control, as the movement of people across borders can strain resources and infrastructure in receiving countries.

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

It is important to note that the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region has not only impacted the livelihoods of the local population but has also triggered social unrest and conflict, further driving migratory patterns in the region. The pollution of land and water sources, coupled with the loss of traditional livelihoods, has created a sense of insecurity and vulnerability among the local communities (Adelekan, 2015). This has led to tensions over scarce resources, competition for jobs, and conflicts between different ethnic groups in the region.

Additionally, the intersection of environmental insecurity and conflict has further played a significant role in shaping migratory patterns in the Niger Delta. The prevalence of armed conflict, oil-related violence, and communal disputes has displaced many people from their homes, leading to both internal displacement and cross-border migration (Isitor, 2019). The breakdown of social cohesion and trust within communities has further fueled migration as people seek safety and stability in other locations.

Just like Isitor, Oruonye & Enete (2019) pointed out that the environmental challenges in the Niger Delta have not only contributed to migration within the region but have also spurred transnational movements to other countries in search of better living conditions. The degradation of the environment, coupled with economic marginalization and social instability, has resulted in widespread poverty and insecurity, prompting many individuals and families to seek opportunities elsewhere (Oruonye & Enete, 2019). This has led to a complex web of migratory patterns that span both internal and external borders, reflecting the interconnected nature of environmental issues and migration in the region.

The impact of environmental insecurity on migration in the Niger Delta extends beyond economic factors to encompass broader social and cultural dimensions. The loss of land, livelihoods, and community ties has disrupted traditional ways of life and cultural practices, leading to a sense of dislocation and alienation among the affected population (Boroh & Okodudu, 2021; Anifowose & Areola, 2016). Migration is often driven by not only economic imperatives but also a desire for security, belonging, and a better quality of life, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the migration experience in the context of environmental insecurity.

Theme: *African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century*



Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

The dynamics of environmental insecurity and migration in the Niger Delta are further shaped by governance challenges, including corruption, weak institutions, and inadequate enforcement of environmental regulations. These governance failures have perpetuated the cycle of environmental degradation and social inequities, exacerbating the plight of marginalized communities and fueling migration as a survival strategy (Uyi, 2018).

Furthermore, the impact of environmental insecurity and conflict on migratory patterns in the Niger Delta is particularly pronounced among vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly. These groups often bear the brunt of environmental degradation and are disproportionately affected by the consequences of conflict, leading to increased vulnerability and a higher likelihood of displacement (Ibeakanma & Uyigue, 2018). As a result, they are more likely to engage in migration as a coping mechanism to escape the harsh conditions in the region.

However, in response to the complex interplay between environmental challenges and migration in the Niger Delta, there is a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive and inclusive approaches that integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations. By promoting community participation, stakeholder engagement, and the empowerment of marginalized groups, it is possible to foster resilience, reduce vulnerabilities, and support sustainable livelihoods in the face of environmental insecurity (Ocheni & Ochugboju, 2020). It is essential to point out that these efforts to address the complex interplay between environmental insecurity, conflict, and migration in the Niger Delta require a comprehensive approach that considers the root causes of these challenges. In other words, promoting peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and environmental conservation initiatives are important in order to create a conducive environment for sustainable development and stability in the region (Ikporukpo, 2017). Additionally, enhancing the resilience of communities through capacity-building, livelihood diversification, and social protection measures can help reduce the impacts of environmental degradation and conflict on migration.

Therefore, a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of environmental degradation, promotes social justice, and ensures the protection of human rights is essential for addressing the challenges posed by environmental insecurity and migration in the Niger Delta.

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Push-Pull theoretical model in a bid to understand the nexus between environmental insecurity and migratory patterns in the Niger Delta. The Push-Pull theoretical framework, which was first proposed by Everett Lee in 1966, provides a conceptual lens for understanding the factors that influence migration patterns. According to this theory, individuals are pushed out of their origin locations by factors such as environmental degradation, economic disadvantages, and social instability (push factors), while they are simultaneously pulled towards destination areas by the promise of better opportunities, improved living conditions, and social networks (pull factors).

In the context of the environmental insecurity and migratory patterns in the Niger Delta, the Push-Pull theoretical framework offers a valuable perspective for analyzing the dynamics at play. The environmental challenges and associated impacts, such as land degradation, pollution, and loss of livelihoods, act as significant push factors that compel individuals and communities to seek alternative locations for survival and economic sustenance. These environmental pressures create a sense of urgency and necessity for migration, as staying in the affected areas becomes increasingly untenable.

On the opposite side, the pull factors, which include the allure of better economic prospects, improved living conditions, and access to social networks, influence the destination choices of migrants from the Niger Delta. Urban centers, both within Nigeria and in neighboring countries, often serve as attractive destinations for migrants seeking employment opportunities, social support systems, and a chance at a better quality of life. The interplay between push factors compelling individuals to leave the environmentally insecure areas and pull factors attracting them to new locations underscores the complexity of migration patterns in the region.

By integrating the Push-Pull theoretical framework into the ongoing study of environmental insecurity and migratory patterns in the Niger Delta, we can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations and drivers of migration. This theoretical lens helps elucidate the interrelationships between environmental degradation, socio-economic factors, and migration decision-making processes, highlighting the multifaceted nature of human mobility in response to environmental challenges. Moreover, the framework provides a structured

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

approach for analyzing the nuanced interactions between push and pull factors, thereby informing policy interventions and solutions that address the root causes of migration in the context of environmental insecurity.

Methods

The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, to gather and analyze data. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 180 participants across three states of the Niger Delta region (Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers), that include 150 quantitative survey respondents and 30 interview/FGD participants who could provide in-depth insights into their migratory patterns. These participants include in and out migrants, local residents, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders. To gather qualitative data, the study conducted interviews and focus group discussions. Conducting semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed participants to share their lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges regarding oil-induced environmental insecurities. Focus group discussions provided an opportunity for participants to have group interactions and express their views as regards migratory patterns. For quantitative data, the study used a self-designed questionnaire. This was made up of standardized scales, Likert-type items, and closed-ended questions to gather data on factors informing their decision to migrate and their migratory choices. For the sake of analysis, the study employed thematic approach for the qualitative data using identified patterns, themes, and categories from the interview transcripts and focus group discussions. Meanwhile, for quantitative data, the study used descriptive statistics to summarize participants' responses to closed-ended questions to examine statistically significant differences in migratory patterns and choices.

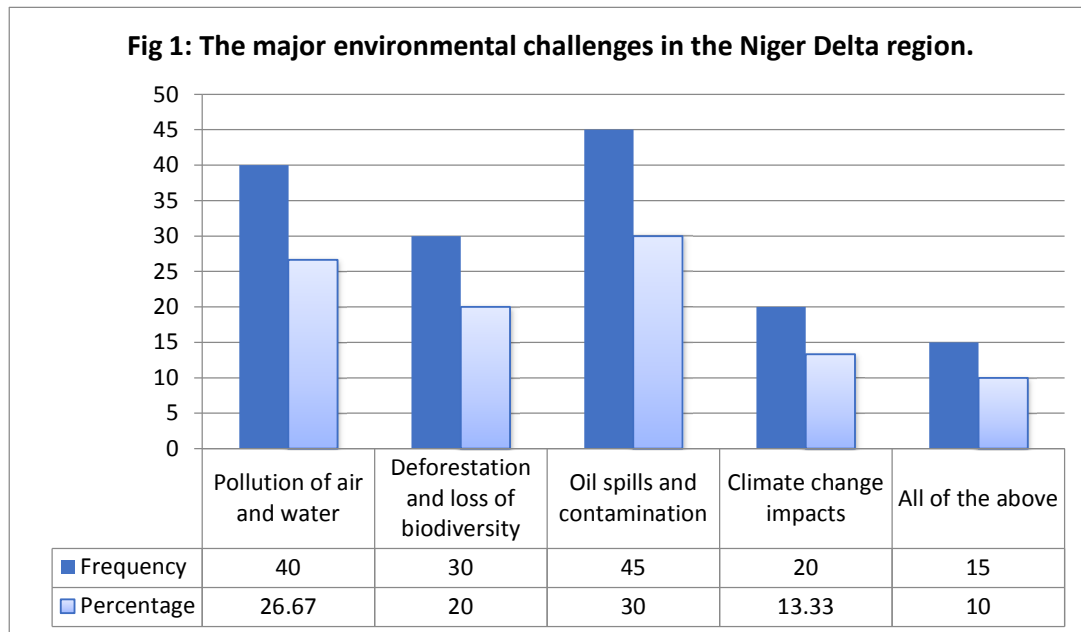
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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

Results

Environmental Insecurity and Migration Factors:



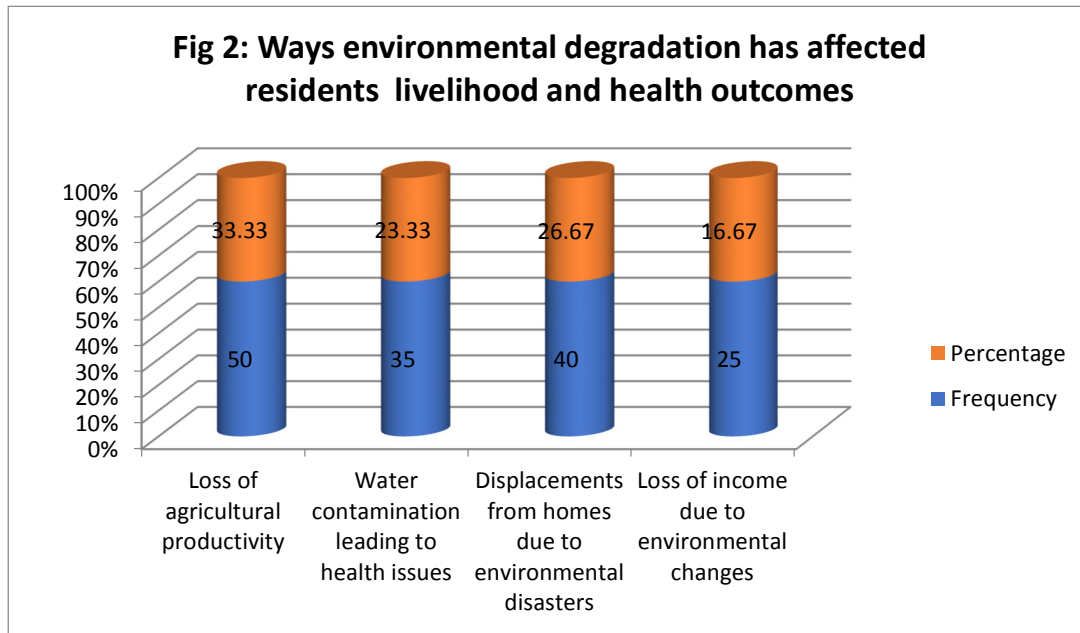
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The data from Fig. 1 above shows that the major environmental challenges in the Niger Delta region are predominantly oil spills and contamination, with 45 respondents (30%) highlighting this issue. Pollution of air and water follows closely with 40 respondents (26.67%) noting its significance. Deforestation and loss of biodiversity, as well as climate change impacts, were also significant concerns, with frequencies of 30 (20%) and 20 (13.33%) respectively. Additionally, 15 respondents (10%) recognized that all of the mentioned challenges affect the region.

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024



Source: Field Survey, 2024.

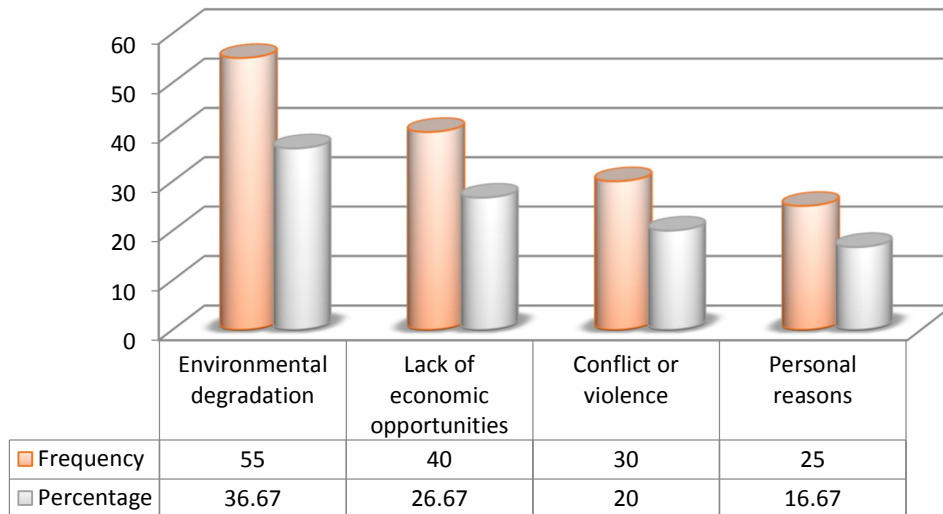
When it comes to ways through which environmental degradation has affected resident's livelihood and health outcomes, Fig. 2 above reveals that environmental degradation has had diverse impacts on livelihood and health outcomes as reported by the respondents. Loss of agricultural productivity was the most mentioned consequence, with 50 respondents (33.33%) attributing it to environmental degradation. Water contamination leading to health issues and displacement from homes due to environmental disasters were also significant, with frequencies of 35 (23.33%) and 40 (26.67%) respectively. Loss of income due to environmental changes was noted by 25 respondents (16.67%).

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

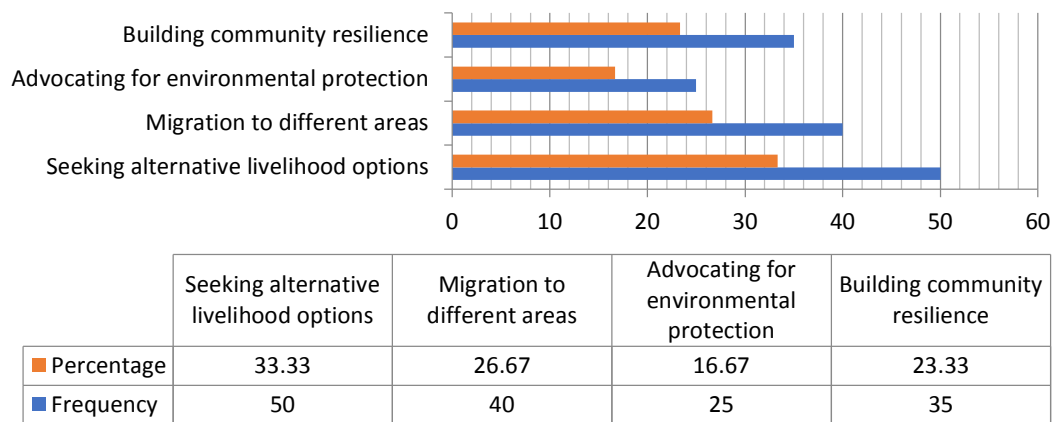
Fig. 3: Factors that influences migration decision



Source: Field Survey, 2024.

When considering factors that influenced the decision of residents to migrate, Fig. 3 shows that environmental degradation emerged as the most prominent reason, with 55 respondents (36.67%) citing it. Lack of economic opportunities followed closely with 40 respondents (26.67%) attributing their migration decision to this factor. Conflict or violence and family reasons were also identified, with frequencies of 30 (20%) and 25 (16.67%) respectively.

Fig. 4: Strategies adopted to cope with environmental insecurities in the Niger Delta.



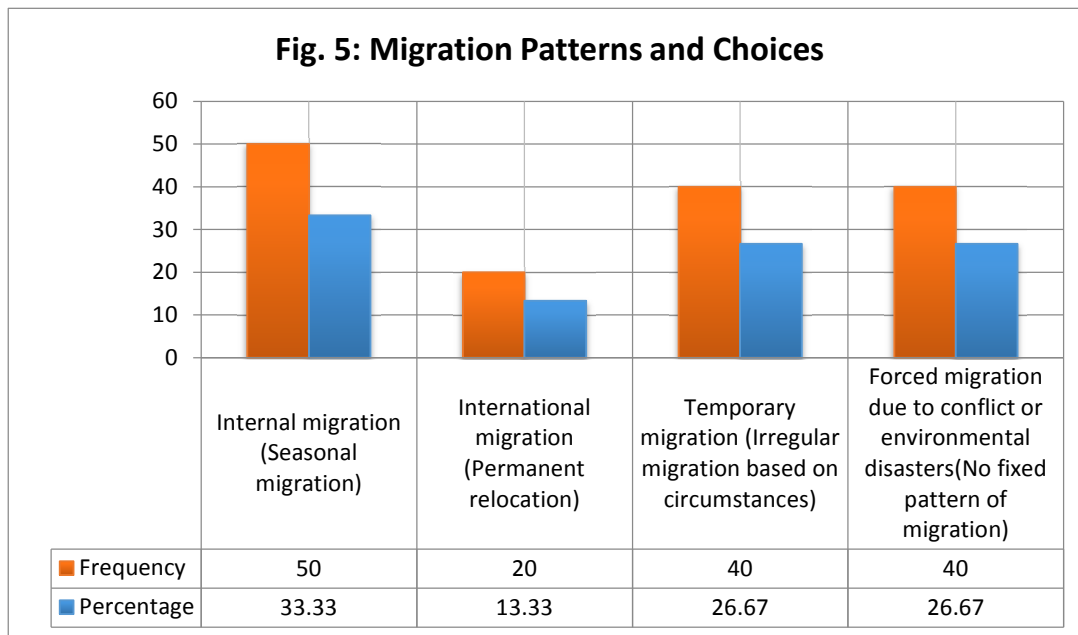
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Theme: *African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century*



**Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty
of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024**

In coping with environmental insecurities in the Niger Delta region, Fig. 4 reveals that the most common strategies employed by respondents included seeking alternative livelihood options, as indicated by 50 respondents (33.33%). Meanwhile, migration to different areas and building community resilience were also prevalent strategies, with frequencies of 40 (26.67%) and 35 (23.33%) respectively. Advocating for environmental protection was mentioned by 25 respondents (16.67%).



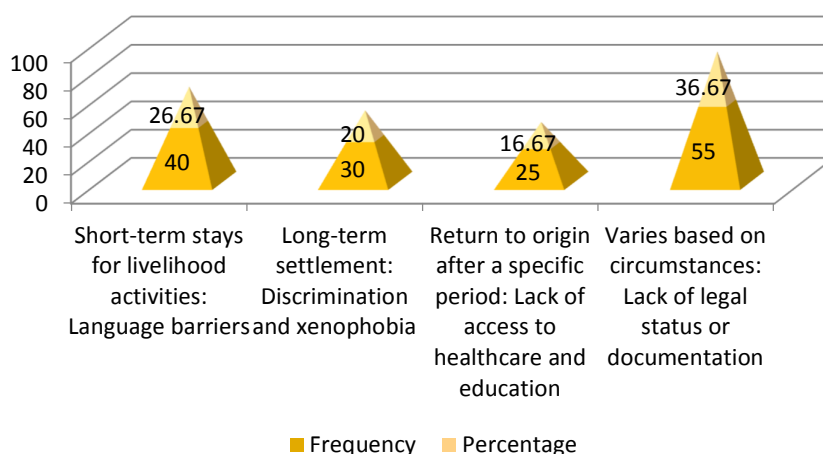
Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Regarding previous migration patterns and choices, internal migration within the country (seasonal migration) was the most common, with 50 respondents (33.33%) having undertaken this type of migration. Forced migration due to conflict or environmental disasters without any fixed pattern of migration and temporary migration (irregular migration based on circumstances) were reported by 40 respondents each (26.67%), while international migration (permanent relocation) was cited by 20 respondents (13.33%).

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Fig. 6: Duration of stay and experiences during this period



Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Fig. 6 above set out to explain respondents' stay duration in destination areas, the chart shows that duration of stay and experiences during this period varies, with 55 respondents (36.67%) indicating that it varies based on circumstances and due to these circumstances, they often experience issues of lack of legal status or documentations. Short-term stays for livelihood activities were reported by 40 respondents (26.67%). These set of respondents expressed language barrier as a major setback. Those who migrated on a long-term settlement basis were mentioned by 30 (20%), and they experienced issues such as discriminations and xenophobia while those who return to their places of origin after a specific period where 25 (16.67%) respondents. These set of respondents indicated experiencing access to basic amenities such as health-care and education.

Findings from the interview

While the questionnaire data focused more on the migration patterns and choices, the interviews and focus group discussions delved into the lived experiences of residents,

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Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

migrants and indigent members of the Niger delta region. The following data obtained from these discussions are captured in the themes below.

Theme 1: Environmental Insecurities in the Niger Delta Region

Just as reflected in the questionnaire data presented in fig 1 above, participants of this focus group discussion sessions highlighted various environmental insecurities they face in the Niger Delta region. Pollution of air and water, climate change impacts, and oil spills were significant concerns affecting their health, livelihoods, and traditional practices. For instance, when asked to share their experiences with environmental insecurities in the Niger Delta region, the following participants noted that:

Participant 1:

The pollution of air and water is a constant threat to our health and livelihood and despite these threats, we're still struggling to make ends meet as there are no other option or alternative for us to sustain with.
FGD participant, Male, aged 51years.

Participant 2:

Climate change impacts have disrupted our traditional way of life and farming practices. Most times we don't even bother about farming because the many times we have tried yielded no harvest. Even the little we strive with cannot sustain us let alone to be used for commercial purpose that is why we are suffering food scarcity in the face of the current economic downtime. FGD participant, Male, aged 46years.

Participant 3:

Oil spills and contamination have devastated our communities, leading to loss of biodiversity. Those of us who are fishermen and women now have to travel far, sometimes for a period of two to three months for fishing activities. FGD participant, Male, aged 39years.

Theme: African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century



Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

Suffice to say that these responses reflect a common theme of environmental degradation and its adverse effects on the communities. The reasons for such responses could be the tangible and visible impact of these environmental insecurities on the daily lives of the participants, leading to a sense of urgency and concern for their well-being and environment.

Theme 2: Impact of Migration on Livelihood and Social Relationships

Migration emerged as a topic affecting participants' livelihoods and social relationships despite being an alternative to environmental insecurities in the region. In a bid to understand these inconsistencies, questions such as how migration has impacted your livelihood and social relationships were raised. Responses showed a mixed impact of migration, indicating opportunities for better jobs but also challenges such as strain on family relationships, changes in social interactions, and potential isolation. According to our respondents;

Participant 4:

Migration provided me with better opportunities but also strained my family relationships. The increased distance from my family and the demands of the opportunities I found caused strain on our relationship. I actually found it challenging to balance work commitments with maintaining regular communication and visits to my family back home. This resulted in feelings of guilt and conflict within my family network. FGD participant, Female, aged 36years.

Participant 5:

Leaving my home due to environmental disasters had both positive and negative effects on my livelihood. While the move provided me with opportunities to start afresh and access resources that were no longer available here in the Niger Delta due to these disasters, it also brought me challenges such as adjusting to a different environment, finding comfort, and rebuilding social connections. I just had to navigate the mixed impact of leaving my home due to environmental conditions on my livelihood and well-being. FGD participant, Male, aged 45years.

Theme: African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century



Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

Participant 6:

Truth is that I understand the devastating effects that environmental degradation have on us in the Niger Delta. It is even what compelled me to migrate to nearby Benin republic. However, despite the initial challenges associated with leaving your comfort zone, i gradually developed new social relationships in the area. I learnt to participate in social activities and shared interests. In any case, I did not only overcome isolation but also built meaningful connections that enriched my social life. FGD participant, Female, aged 31years.

It is important to point out that the evolution of this participant's social relationships as she migrated exemplifies the dynamic nature of social interactions during migration experiences. However, the varying responses suggest that migration is a complex process with both positive and negative consequences. This ambivalence could stem from the trade-offs individuals make when seeking better opportunities elsewhere, and the emotional toll of leaving familiar environments.

Theme 3: Coping Strategies Shared Among Community Members

When it comes to coping strategies, participants recognized shared coping strategies within their communities for addressing environmental challenges and migration issues. Strategies like seeking alternative livelihood options, advocating for environmental protection, and building community resilience were identified as common approaches. The responses underscore a sense of unity and collaboration among community members in responding to shared adversities. The solidarity expressed by participants suggests a collective effort to navigate the complexities of environmental insecurities and migration, highlighting the strength of communal support systems in times of crisis.

Participant 10, acknowledges that community members in the Niger Delta region often rely on seeking alternative ways of generating income and promoting environmental conservation as coping strategies in response to environmental challenges and migration issues. This suggests that individuals like are proactive in finding new sources of livelihood that are

Theme: *African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century*



Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

resilient to environmental insecurities, such as engaging in sustainable agriculture or eco-friendly businesses. Additionally, advocating for environmental protection reflects a collective effort to address the root causes of environmental threats and promote sustainable practices within the community. By actively seeking alternative livelihood options and advocating for environmental protection, community members like David demonstrate their commitment to adapting and responding to environmental and migration-related challenges effectively.

Participant 11 on the other hand, highlights the collaborative approach taken by community members in building resilience to cope with environmental insecurities and migration issues. Her response emphasizes the importance of solidarity and mutual support within the community when facing adversities. By working together to strengthen community resilience, individuals participate in collective efforts aimed at enhancing preparedness, response, and recovery from environmental challenges and migration impacts. This shared commitment to building community resilience fosters a sense of unity and cooperation, enabling community members to navigate challenges more effectively and sustainably.

Participant 12 recognizes the diversity of experiences among community members in dealing with environmental insecurities and migration issues while emphasizing a common bond of solidarity that unites them. His opinion suggests that despite individual variations in how people experience and respond to challenges, there is an overarching sense of unity and mutual support within the community. This shared solidarity serves as a source of strength and resilience, encouraging community members to come together, share resources, and support one another in addressing environmental insecurities and migration-related difficulties. Through this collective sense of solidarity, individuals find comfort and strength in knowing that they are not alone in facing the complex issues affecting the region.

Discussion of findings

Environmental insecurity and migratory patterns in the Niger Delta Region are closely intertwined, as highlighted by the data and findings presented and interpreted. The environmental challenges faced in the region, notably oil spills, pollution, climate change impacts, and loss of biodiversity, have significant implications for the livelihoods and health

Theme: *African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century*



Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

outcomes of the residents. These challenges have led to loss of agricultural productivity, health issues from water contamination, displacement from homes due to environmental disasters, and loss of income due to environmental changes. The data also reveals that environmental degradation is a key factor influencing the decision to migrate, along with lack of economic opportunities, conflict or violence, and family reasons.

In examining coping strategies, the data demonstrates that seeking alternative livelihood options, migration to different areas, and building community resilience are common strategies employed by residents to address environmental insecurities. Moreover, advocating for environmental protection is recognized as another approach to combat the environmental challenges in the Niger Delta region. These findings indicate a proactive response from the community in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of environmental degradation through collective efforts and individual actions.

Migration patterns and choices among respondents vary, with internal migration within the country, forced migration due to conflicts or environmental disasters, and temporary migration for livelihood activities being common experiences. Urban areas emerged as the favored destination for migration, although international migration to neighboring countries was also observed. Respondents' stay durations in destination areas varied based on circumstances, with social integration experiences reflecting a mix of building new social networks and relationships, adapting to cultural norms, and facing discrimination and exclusion.

The qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions further emphasize the challenges posed by environmental insecurities in the Niger Delta region, with pollution, climate change impacts, and oil spills significantly affecting the health, livelihoods, and traditional practices of the residents. The impact of migration on livelihoods and social relationships is evident through the mixed experiences shared by participants, highlighting both opportunities for better jobs and challenges such as strain on family relationships and social interactions. Coping strategies within communities include seeking alternative livelihood options, advocating for environmental protection, and building community resilience, underscoring the importance of communal support in addressing shared adversities.

Theme: *African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century*



Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the data and findings discussed provide valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between environmental insecurity and migratory patterns in the Niger Delta region. As the region continues to grapple with environmental challenges and migration dynamics, collaborative efforts, community resilience, and sustainable practices are essential for addressing these issues and promoting the well-being of the residents. Based on these, the study recommends the following:

1. Promote and implement sustainable environmental management practices in the Niger Delta region to address the root causes of environmental degradation, including oil spills, pollution, and deforestation. This can involve stricter regulations on oil exploration activities, promoting eco-friendly agricultural practices, and investing in renewable energy sources to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
2. Support and strengthen community resilience and capacities to cope with environmental challenges and reduce the need for displacement. This can be achieved through community-based initiatives, training programs on climate-smart agriculture, disaster preparedness workshops, and access to alternative livelihood options that are less susceptible to environmental insecurities.
3. Improve access to education and skills training opportunities for residents in the Niger Delta region to empower them to adapt to changing environmental conditions and explore diverse livelihood options. Investing in education and vocational training can enhance the resilience of individuals and communities, enabling them to better navigate environmental challenges and reduce the likelihood of forced migration.
4. Promote sustainable livelihood diversification strategies among residents, including aquaculture, eco-tourism, agroforestry, and small-scale enterprises, to reduce dependence on environmentally sensitive sectors and provide alternative income sources. Encouraging sustainable livelihood diversification not only enhances economic resilience but also contributes to environmental conservation efforts in the region.
5. Facilitate multi-stakeholder collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and local communities to develop integrated policies and programs

Theme: *African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century*



**Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty
of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024**

that address both environmental insecurities and migration dynamics in a holistic manner. By fostering partnerships and knowledge-sharing platforms, stakeholders can work together to design evidence-based interventions that cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of the residents in the Niger Delta region.

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Theme: *African Solutions to Emerging Challenges: Building Viable Democratic, Economic, Information and Sustainable Systems in the 21st Century*



Proceedings of the 2nd (Hybrid) International Conference, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Held on March 13, 2024

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