

Assessment of socioeconomic vulnerabilities in communities surrounding Kolmani oil field, Bauchi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The communities around Kolmani River basin have come to limelight since the discovery of huge deposits of hydrocarbon estimated to be over one billion barrels and over 500 billion cubic feet of gas around the basin. The discovery has led to the exposure of communities around Kolmani oil field, thereby making them vulnerable to various socioeconomic threats kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, loss of fertile farmlands, and destruction of vital ecosystem. This paper adopts Human security theory which is centered on the wellbeing of persons amidst prevailing threat(s) and social constructivism theory which postulates that identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by shared ideas, and not given by nature to understand the causal relationship between presence of valuable natural resource and the perceptions/demands of communities therein, as espoused by Alexander Wendt's tenets of social constructivism. This paper utilized both primary and secondary sources of data, primary data was obtained through KII from community leaders/stakeholders, and secondary data was obtained qualitatively via extant literatures, Newspaper Publications particularly Wikki-Times (A local Newspaper with interests in happenings within Bauchi State). Data obtained was analyzed thematically. Findings reveals that activities of oil exploration has exposed these communities to various forms of insecurity, further finding reveals that the exploration activities have had a significant effects on the fragile ecosystem of the Yankari Games Reserve which is 16km away from the field , amongst other vulnerabilities.

Keywords: Kolmani oil field, insecurity, communities-vulnerability

Introduction

The Kolmani oil field, located in between Bauchi and Gombe States, Nigeria have become a critical focal point for both economic development and security concerns. The discovery of oil heralds a significant potential for economic growth, creation of jobs and infrastructural boost. However, this potential has been dwindled by a complex socioeconomic and security dynamics that characterizes oil rich locations. More often than not, communities around significant national assets and treasures are vulnerable to a plethora of socioeconomic risks and are likely to become a beehive for criminals and a soft target for those wishing to unleash terror, thereby having significant implications on their security and standing against the quest for sustainable development. In Nigeria, several scholarly submissions have attributed presence of natural resource or a goldmine to diverse socioeconomic vulnerability- most especially in oil rich Niger-Delta (Ogundiya, I. S, 2009) and more recently around illegal mining sites in Zamfara State, Northwest Nigeria, amongst others (Abdullahi, M., 2021).

These submissions to an extend underscores Michael Ross's submissions on "resource curse" highlighting how petroleum wealth shapes the development of nations (Ross, M. L., 2012),

although Kolmani oil fields exploration is yet to be completed, the above submissions offers a preamble of why recent happenings around communities situated in the area have exposed to criminal elements in forms of banditry, kidnap for ransom and cattle rustling. Since the discovery of huge deposits of crude oil and natural gas at Kolmani area in the upper Benue-basin in the 1900s, industrialized survey and drilling of identified points have not commence until the regime of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, after years of extensive surveys, all preliminary works were concluded and oil well wells were mapped out that could generate 120,000 barrels per day capacity, a gas processing plant of up to 500 million standard cubic feet per day, a power plant of up to 500 Megawatts capacity, and a fertilizer plant of 2,500 tons per day (Vanguard online Newspaper, 22nd November, 2022).

However, since the official commissioning of the drilling project by erstwhile President Muhammadu Buhari in November, 2022, the communities have suffered incessant attacks in forms of banditry and kidnapping for ransom, this endemic problem is quiet alien to these communities prior to the project, this has rendered them vulnerable amidst underdevelopment, distance from urban areas and the abundance of ungovernable spaces around Kolmani oil field, according to reports by Wikkitimes, an online newspaper platform domiciled in Bauchi metropolis, with vast coverage and interests of events around Northeast Nigeria had reported incidents of kidnapping of settlers around these rural dwellers, most of which are farmers and herders, this sad development is detrimental to people's safety, an antidote to the quest of achieving food security and also deadly blow to the quest for achieving sustainable development especially in areas that are Lagging in terms of access to basic healthcare, shelter and education.

These incessant threats have caused untold hardship amongst dwellers of these communities, especially those that become victims of hostage taking and loss of livestock, this has become a bigger brunt to bear as hitherto, many settlers have lost their farmlands to oil exploration drive, without any form(s) compensation from either the Federal Government of Nigerian or the main client (NNPCL) thereby having little or no means of livelihood. These has raised thought provoking questions as to reasons host communities of oil rich and other important natural resource often become vulnerable to these factors and also suffer neglect from successive governments, especially in Nigeria. Although, refining of crude for commercial purpose on the field is yet to commence, analyst and research enthusiast are concerned about the perpetual causal relationship of resources presence to terror, and also a steady neglect of host communities just as mimicking the case of the oil rich Niger Delta region, thereby raising a serious human security concerns.

Therefore, a comprehensive assessment of community vulnerabilities around the Kolmani oil fields is imperative for security and sustainable development.it is against this background that this paper intends to provide an assessment of the vulnerability of these communities around the oil field, with the aim drawing the attention of government(s) and relevant stakeholders to the plight of these people to bring about environmental protection, economic diversification and a robust security measures. This would bring about maximising the benefits of the presence of oil in these communities while minimizing its adverse effects to bring about a peaceful and economic viable Bauchi State.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research method to obtain data, underpinned majorly on key informants interview (KII), the researcher undertook a journey cutting across communities

around the Kolmani oil fields to get opinions from community leaders, Like the Harido of Barambu, Hamlet Head of Mai-Ari, Village Head of Mai-Madi ward, Heads of local Vigilantes around the areas, and community stakeholders like the councillor of Mai-Madi Ward, Alkaleri L.G.A., Bauchi State, a renowned local journalist and an active community leader based in Alkaleri township-Mohammed Abdullahi Walakerol, these persons were interview and useful information about the vulnerability of these communities were submitted. Furthermore, other qualitative data utilised for this research are newspaper publications (print & online) that carried reports on about the happenings in the area e.g. the cable newspaper, the Vanguard newspaper, Wikkitimes newspaper, furthermore, this research also relied on a few scholarly published articles related to the topic under review.

This paper adopts a narrative research design approach which focuses on understanding the experiences of individuals via storytelling to analyse these narratives to explain the problems being examined, findings are interpreted to create a coherent understanding of the phenomenon studied, this research design is valuable for exploring complex human experiences, perspectives and identities in depth.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of theoretical analysis, this paper would adopt two encompassing IR theories, through the lens of these theories this paper would justify the vulnerability of the communities around Kolmani oil fields as a concern for security and sustainable development. These theories are, the Human security theory, social constructivism theory. The Human security theory anchors on the safety and wellbeing of persons and individuals within the framework off the State, vulnerabilities could be related to health, livelihood, and safety especially in vulnerable areas such as the topic of study (Kolmani community and its environs). The concept of human of human security gained prominence in the early 1900s, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, specific security attention shifted to a more holistic approach encompassing human safety, hence the concept was theorized just in tandem with the postulations of the Copenhagen IR school that classified security in to different sectors (Kangdim, D. M., Yorgancioğlu, C., Bulus, K., Muazu, A. Y., & Danladi, S. K., 2022).

The UNDP in 1994 began to raise concerns of human safety to curb issues like hunger, environmental pollution, carbon emission, pollution (Johns, 2015; & Orhero, 2015), this features underscores the plight of communities around the Kolmani River, and persistent air pollution emanating from drill points poised a serious challenge to their health, in a community with no good medical healthcare system. The commission on Human Security (2003) conceptualize human security as “the child that did not die, disease that did not spread, job that was not cut, ethnic tension that did not explode into violence, a dissident who was not silenced”, human insecurities cut across basic education, good governance, and national coercion (Nnam, et al., 2020), to this end, the absence of schools especially at elementary levels would help communities around the oil field to understand the value of what is in their community, presently as at the time of writing this paper (July, 2024), there is no primary schools at Barambu, Kwala and a few disperse settlement that have a closer proximity to the oil field.

Johns (2014) conceived human security as the new wars, foisted by globalization worsened by the proliferation of poverty, Frances Stewart (2004) quoted the commission on human security

and captures a more comprehensive view of human security “human security in its broadest sense embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that everyone has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her own potential freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom of the future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment (CHS, 2003). Engwicht and Ankenbrand (2021) broaden from the submissions of UNDP while trying to examine extractive industry activities in Sierra Leone from the lens of post-colonial era, they conceptualize human security around food security, having physical and economic access to basic food, environmental security, safety from unexpected and persistent environmental damages caused by man-made and natural causes amongst others, the Sierra Leone example also highlights the plights of communities around Kolmani oil fields whose fertile arable lands have been taken, and have become vulnerable to attacks from several non-state armed groups with different nomenclature.

The paper also leverage on the social constructivism theory to interrogate the vulnerability of communities around the Kolmani oil fields, its implications for security and development. Constructivism, since the 1980s and early 1990s has become one of the major schools of thought within international relations, John Ruggie Martha Finnemore, Michael Barnett, Peter Katzenstein, and Alexander Wendt and others have identified several strands of constructivism, Wendt’s submissions on constructivism argues that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and these identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by shared ideas rather than given by nature (Wendt, A., 1995). Consequently, an aspect of this theory establishes a nexus through which social constructions and perceptions influence the impacts of oil drilling activities around these communities, these could be explained in two ways:

- I. Constructivism and social vulnerability, since reality is socially constructed through interactions and perceptions (Wendt, A., 1995), habitants of oil rich environments are socially cloned to feel deprived by default of basic social amenities by virtue of resources discovered by the State in their environs. Hence, agitations for the provisions of basic means of livelihood like water, healthcare, and education emanated.
- II. Impacts of knowledge and discourse, since constructivist highlights the impetus knowledge and discuss in shaping our realities (Wendt A., 1995), this underscores different narratives about oil development around the Kolmani community areas for example, promises of economic development versus environmental degradation has over the years shaped the ideas of community members towards a particular sentiments, for instance, interactions with community’s inhabitants have revealed a general misgivings about promises not fulfilled after needs assessments in the communities, especially from government(s) and most especially development partners, needs assessment cutting across education, healthcare remains a wild dream.

Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities in communities in communities surrounding Kolmani oil fields

Communities around the oil field are vulnerable to a wide range of issues ranging from economic issues, social issues and environmental issues, although not limited to only the aforementioned, these communities situated around the Kolmani valley beneath the lower river Benue basin are communities around Alkaleri L.G.A of Bauchi State and some proportion of communities in Akko Local Government area of Gombe State.

Economic vulnerabilities of these communities' hinges around mitigating factors that militate against key economic activities like farming, fishing around rivers and valleys as well as free access to markets, as reported by a key informant in the community (Mohammed Abdullahi Walakerol) and reports heralded by newspapers like The cable newspapers, Wikkitimes have revealed resentment on how activities of oil exploration had seized/caged farmlands fertile and lucrative for agricultural yields, these has hampered their economic viability prowess especially in recent times of high food inflation, furthermore, these areas are a fishing community- parts of the Benue river trough transcends in to Gongola river to be the source of river Gaji which cuts across the Kolmani areas in villages such as Barumbu, Mai-Ari, Kwala are known for fishing, this trade has been a source of income for families to cater for their casual needs and also serve as a panacea for food security.

However the activities of oil drilling activities over the years have mitigate these prospects, thereby rendering community settlers vulnerable economically and to an extend insecure of food. These economic vulnerabilities also transcends to effects of cattle rustling, this is because a plethora of dwellers around the communities are herders, exposure to a high profile project such as the oil exploration has brought about wanton criminal elements who forcefully cart away cattle which are prized assets of these rural dwellers. According to a key informant (Mallam Hardo) who doubles as a community leader of Barumbu community, a settlement around Kolmani, he opined that these incidents are alien in their communities prior to the discovery, survey and subsequent exploration of hydrocarbon in the area.

Social issues/vulnerabilities around the Kolmani river communities' stems around consistent absence of perpetual peace, inhabitants of these communities are consistent with living in fear for either their lives or property, most especially owners of valuable livestock like cattle. According to Sa'adu Jibrin, a councillor for Maimadi ward, one of the vulnerable areas, stated that the bandits continue to carry out attacks in the area unabated. President Muhammadu Buhari was in Kolmani on November 22nd, however, attacks had occurred every day since the president flagged off oil exploration at the location, kidnapping for ransom is now widespread, in less than twenty (20) days, around thirty (30) persons were kidnapped, with the lowest ransom paid being N2 million. They killed at least ten persons over those time, and the lowest ransom paid was N2 million (Wikki Times online Newspaper, 11th December, 2022). Another key informant (Jibril) revealed that "one individual was killed and his wife kidnapped at Mai-Arin Kudu community, at Zadawa, a youth leader was killed, they shot him seven times before fleeing with his mother and older sister, also at Mai-Arin Arewa community, they killed a parent and fled with their son". Jibrin further stated that a vigilante leader was killed and his daughter was kidnapped in

the Garfatu neighborhood, every day, residents flee for their safety, the complaints we do receive from residents are primarily regarding how to handle these menace, many have ascribed the rise in attacks to the newly discovered oil in the areas.

Environmental concerns around the Kolmani oil fields communities stems from the impacts of drilling and survey activities which destroyed existing ecosystem, the Yankari Games Reserve which about 16 kilometers is the nearest most vulnerable treasure located closer to the drilling site, The proximity of the oil field infrastructure to the wildlife reserve emphasizes the need of preventing an ecological crisis in the basin. The conservation reserve spans 2,244 km² and houses a rich wildlife population, including elephants, lions, buffalos, and hippopotamuses. Drilling operations can cause loud noises, human movement, and car traffic, which can endanger animals, the Gaji River, which runs through it, may potentially be affected if the field is exploited, resulting in increased activity and pollution (HuMangle, 2022). Going forward, environmental activist and other conservative organizations like the World Conservative Society (WCS) had lend their voices in dismay about the siting of oil drilling site close to a Game Reserve which has a fragile ecosystem, making references to what other African counterparts like Uganda opposing the activities of oil drill at the country's Murchishon Falls Park.

Implications for Security in communities around Kolmani oil fields

The deafening silence in communities around kolmani oil fields have culminated in to turning the communities to a web for criminal activities, the exploration that was described as a milestone in Nigeria's energy sector has received little or no attention from the government since the end of the tenure of President Muhammadu Buhari, contractors, site engineers and other stakeholders in the project have deserted site. This grave silence gave leverage to criminal elements have a field day in carrying out different forms of crimes such as kidnap for ransom, cattle rustling, armed robbery amongst others, thereby tormenting the livelihood of community members and commuters around the field, this act of terror brought to the fore continued submissions on the nexus between availability of oil resource to increased insecurity, albeit, these security concerns differ to that of the Niger-Delta region, the former is characterized mostly by frustration and misgivings of host communities, particularly, these resentments are directed towards the government and international oil companies (IOCs) for their inability to carryout environmental obligations, whereas, the latter emanated from the opening of the Kolmani areas on the lower Benue basin, the discovery came with multi-facets criminal tendencies, hitherto, these scenario was alien to the communities.

Local settlers around the field have attributed parts of the intense security challenges to a phenomenon of ownership of the field, especially amongst border communities within Bauchi and Gombe States, one Mallam Jarma, a resident of Mai-Madi Ward, in Alkaleri L.G.A. in Bauchi State, Nigeria opined that,

As children, we were familiar with Maimadi and Barumbu, but the oil wells are in Barumbu, Alkaleri LGA of Bauchi state. Kolmani, a river 6 kilometers away, was named for interest by people from Gombe. Kolmani, Bauchi, and Barambu are approximately 5 kilometers apart, the name Kolmani, which was coined by Gombe surveyors out of curiosity, is really in Gombe rather than Bauchi, since

the oil wells are in Barambu (in Bauchi State), not Kolmani, the debate over oil drilling in Barambu caused tensions between the nearby villages''. Reaffirming these claims of Jarma, Mallam Mahdi, a settler of Mai-Ari in Alkaleri L.G.A of Bauchi State highlights that "Our relationship with our neighboring state before the exploration was cordial, there was a peaceful relationship and intermarriages between us, but since the exploration matter started, we began to notice changes, hitches, and arguments, the oil is in our area, not in Gombe, I am almost 60 and I was born in this area, there is an oil well in Sabon-Kaduna, and there is another one where the aircraft parks, all of the wells are situated in Bauchi State, Mahdi further added that, to prevent incessant communal clashes between communities, suggestions demand mapping the areas to demarcate both States.

Mahdi also reiterates that, they've got serious insecurity problems since the start of oil exploration in their communities till date, pleading with government at local and State levels to expedite actions towards flushing out criminals perpetrating various forms of crime.

Stakeholders, especially the Bauchi State government and other development partners have reiterated commitments towards ensuring the safety of properties and settlers around the Kolmani region, of recent, the State government alongside members of the Revenue mobilization and fiscal allocation commission (RMFAC) went on inspection to the areas of oil exploration, the State's deputy governor who represented the governor assured the commitment towards ensuring safety of communities and liaise with the Federal government to ensure that the project receives fresh commitment towards completion of the project (Daily Post News Paper December 10th, 2024). Furthermore, the visitation team led by the Deputy Governor promised continued collaboration with State actors especially the Nigerian Army, Police and Civil defense corps for routine safety operations in areas and communities around the field.

Concerns for Sustainable Development

The discovery of huge deposits of hydrocarbon in Kolmani oil fields in Bauchi State had been received with joy and high optimism, Nigeria's energy security drive. However, this glaring prospect has been greatly undermined by concerns that mitigate sustainable development drive in Bauchi State and Northeast region of Nigeria in general, most noticeable the abandonment of the project by the Federal Government of Nigeria and growing security challenges in surrounding communities.

One of the concerns is that local populations may be displaced and abandoned as a result of oil prospecting activity. While the Nigerian government and oil firms promote the economic benefits of the Kolmani oil resources, many local populations have been displaced, with no compensation or resettlement assistance. These communities, which once relied on subsistence farming and small-scale trading, have become marginalized and economically vulnerable. The absence of effective infrastructural development, combined with inadequate attention to the welfare of displaced persons, has left these towns in limbo. Without proper investment in education, healthcare, and social amenities, the promise of oil money may become hollow for those who have lived in the region for generations.

Exacerbating these issues is the insecurity problems in Northeastern Nigeria due to the activities of non-State armed group's local militia, Bandits and kidnapping for ransom, the region, over the years has been plagued by activities of the offshoots of Boko Haram who operate with relative impunity, these problems have created an environment of fear and tension, making it difficult for development to thrive, with local and potential foreign investors reluctant to invest in the region, even the oil fields in itself, though seen to be a potential of great wealth is vulnerable to attacks and sabotage, thereby mitigating investments and development efforts.

These security challenges doesn't only pose a threat to the prospects of oil exploration, but also heightened the plights of local communities, with wide range of violence, limited access to farm lands, cattle rustling, crippled economy, the quest for sustainable development remains elusive. A plethora of scholarly works have aligned to the fact that communities vulnerability and insecurity strongly mitigates the quest for sustainable development, for instance Insecurity issues have led a bigger proportion of internal resources and attention to be directed only to the security sector, with meagre resources at its disposal, Nigerian leadership is confronted with the problem of prioritizing security spending over viable human capital development and other growth and productivity-promoting sectors, this, without a doubt, poses a serious challenge to a dynamic framework for job creation and poverty eradication, which is, of course, the hallmark of sustainable development (Umaru, A., et. al 2015).

Since crude oil export constitute the major source of foreign exchange earnings for the Federal government of Nigeria, hostilities prevalent in areas of potential crude oil like Kolmani mitigates the quest for robust revenue to drive government's spending in basic infrastructure and capital projects (Chris, O.I., et. al, 2021). Nigeria, currently struggling to meet up the preferred benchmark of 2M barrels/day crude production as projected in the 2025 medium term expenditure framework (MTEF), with Kolmani's potential, it could add to Nigeria's revenue drive which would in the long run boost energy security and bring about sustainable development.

Conclusion

Given the foregoing challenges, sustainable development in the Kolmani oil field region necessitates a multifaceted strategy, the Federal Government of Nigeria and oil firms must prioritize the completion of exploration activities to actualize the purpose of ensuring energy security, increased revenue for government, stakeholders should do well in inclusion and well-being of locals in development process, this involves assuring proper compensation for displaced persons and investing in key infrastructure like schools, hospitals. Furthermore, peacebuilding initiatives must be prioritized in regional strategy, since enhanced security is required to stabilize economic activity and enable long-term growth. This paper recommends that the Federal government should expedite actions towards the completion of Kolmani oil field to boost energy security and improve government's revenue drive. The also recommend that government, especially at State level to improve security of lives and property in communities around the field, so that the loss of lives would be mitigated and also farming activities would be boosted.

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