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SOCIAL ECOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN THE NIGER DELTA

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Abstract

The environmental crisis is affecting and afflicting the entire world. The Niger Delta region is not exempted from the crisis. Nigeria's Niger Delta which is home to a vast abundance of oil and gas wealth has been gravely affected by the activities of oil multinational companies. Much of the environment of the Niger Delta is suffering from decades of oil exploration. While enormous wealth is taken from the region to enrich the multinational oil companies and the coffers of the Federal Government of Nigeria, not much has returned to the Niger Delta in terms of development. There is also the issue of corruption among local elites who siphon funds meant for development in the region. This paper examines if the theory of social ecology can add value to the debate on environmental protection in the Niger Delta. Through a critical analytic method, the paper unravels the issues in social ecology and argues that there are ideas from social ecology that can help foster environmental protection in the Niger Delta. The paper finds that there is massive environmental degradation, poverty, and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta. The paper concludes that while the ideology of social ecology may not be a total panacea to the problems of the Niger Delta, it can contribute to ameliorating the ecological problems in the Niger Delta in creating a sustainable Niger Delta.

Keywords: Social ecology, Environment, Environmental protection, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Introduction

The environmental crisis remains unabated and every country and region in the world is experiencing it. It is well known that the environmental crisis is essentially anthropogenic, arising from human activities such as rapid industrialization, mechanized agriculture, urbanization, overpopulation, etc. There is hardly any human activity that does not impact the earth. As human beings carry out their activities, they negatively make use of the earth's resources and deplete them. The challenge is to minimize the human footprints on the planet. Human beings have a right to make use of the earth's resources to sustain themselves. Non-human beings and nature also deserve to be protected and conserved for the good of the ecosystems and human beings themselves. While some human activities are necessary such as farming, housing, extractive industries, etc, they should be ethically moderated so that they have less impact on the earth. Some other activities are in themselves negative as they move beyond moderate use of the earth's resources to dangerously damaging or degrading the environment. These activities include deforestation, careless dumping or mismanagement of solid and chemical waste, noise pollution, gas flaring, environmental warfare, etc.

Among the regions in the world suffering from environmental crisis in the form of various environmental degradation is the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The Niger Delta of Nigeria has suffered from different environmental problems such as oil spillage and pollution, gas flaring, acid rain, and coastal soil erosion. Many authors such as Ogbonnaya (2011), Onyi-Ogelle and Nwosu (2019), Uranta (2009),

and Ekabo (2016), all affirm the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta. The concern of this paper is to argue for environmental protection in the Niger Delta. Hamilton and Macintosh (2008) state that: “Environmental protection has always been practiced by humans in one form or another. However, as anthropogenic pressures on the environment have escalated over the past century, the need for systematic environmental protection has increased” (par 1).

Conceptual Clarifications

Online MSW Programs (2022) defines social ecology as the way individuals interact and relate with the environment surrounding them and the consequent effects of these interactions both on the environment and society. The social ecologist is interested in the interactions of the entire system and not simply only an aspect. It is a well-known fact that Murray Bookchin a prominent ecologist introduced the concept of social ecology emphasizing the need to look at interactions in the entire system instead of just looking at individual ecological problems. StudySmarter (2024) states that social ecology is concerned with unfair relationships and hierarchical structures in society responsible for contemporary climate change, and environmental degradation, and human beings should live in connection and harmony with nature. Fischer-Kowalski (2015) writes that social ecology is a paradigm that shows that natural systems and humans interact as humans make use of energy, land, and produce food; and as all these take place humans make an impact on nature. Clark (2008) writes that social ecology describes the relationship between human beings and the natural world, and it argues that exploitative, hierarchical, and authoritarian relationships create ecological problems. Clark (1998) writes that social ecology can be seen as the earth community awakening to reflect on its history, current problems, and the way into the future. A summation of what social ecology is stated by Ezedike (2020) who writes that its concern is that social injustice and domination are to be conquered to get to environmental wellness. Barry (2001) states that: “Social ecology can be described as a form of eco-anarchism, in which the cause of the ecological crisis lies in structures of hierarchy and power associated with the modern bureaucratic state and corporate capitalism” (p.242).

The concept of environmental protection also needs to be explained here. Anah (2019) quotes Cunningham who defines the environment as the “... circumstances and conditions that surround an organism or a group of organisms” (p.8). Aluko (2006) writes that environment refers to the surroundings and physical space in which humans and other organisms live. Anioke and Nwanosike (2021) write that the environment includes animals, plants soil, air, water, and even the spirit of culture including its law, culture, politics, etc. Environmental protection refers to keeping, nurturing, and conserving humans, their environment, and organisms from harm. It is keeping the quality of the environment from degradation, harm, and whatever negatively affects the welfare and well-being of the humans and non-human lives in the surroundings. Janardhanan (2021) writes that: “Environmental protection refers to the practice of protecting the natural environment by individuals, organizations and governments. Its objectives are to conserve natural resources and the existing natural environment and, where possible, to repair damage and reverse trends.” Bellamy (2007) defines it as “The process of protecting the environment. The part of resource management that is concerned with the discharged into the environment of substances that might be harmful or with harmful physical effects (e.g noise or the release of radiation) and with safeguarding beneficial uses” (p.155).

The Niger Delta can be described in different ways. Chinyere (2022) writes that the Niger Delta refers to the area where the River Niger as it reaches the Gulf of Guinea empties into the Atlantic Ocean and it is made up of 9 states of Ondo, Imo, Abia and the 6 states in the South-South of Nigeria; it was formerly called the Oil Rivers, then the British Oil River Protectorate, and later the Niger Delta Protectorate. The

other 6 states of the Niger Delta are Edo, Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers. Gabriel and Egege (2022) indicate citing the 1993 World Bank Report that the largest wetland in Africa is the Niger Delta and in the world one of the largest. The geographic terrain of the region covers mangrove swamps, freshwater, forests, coastal terrain, etc. Oluniyi (2018) writes that: “The Niger Delta is classified as a tropical rainforest with ecosystems comprising diverse species of flora and fauna, both aquatic and terrestrial species” (p.50). Ekabo (2016) writes of the Niger Delta as richly endowed with natural resources and human potential, with rich deposits of gas and oil, and brings to Nigeria more than 90% of external revenue.

Basic Tenets of Social Ecology

Since social ecology is mainly associated with Bookchin, key ideas on describing social ecology will be taken from him. He has been called an ecological anarchist. At the heart of this theory is that Bookchin questions the hierarchical systems of society which have devastated society and by extension, the environment. Bookchin argued that society and life should be seen as an ecosystem where all aspects have a role to play in the stability and health of the system. StudySmarter (2024) notes that three key principles of social ecology are: Self-management (self-control, non-reliance on external authority through participatory democracy), ecological restructuring (through creating renewable solutions), and communalism (communal ownership and confederation of decentralized independent communities). Other key themes as Crist (2009) shows include: nature and humans are in an evolutionary process in which more diversity, freedom, complicity, and consciousness come into being; social structures are responsible for ecological degradation, capitalism is a major force in ecological disruptions, revolutionary abolition of all forms of dominance in preference for complementarity, interconnections and cooperation. For Bookchin (1996), nature and society are so interconnected and unified, though there is a differentiation humans should not be lifted over and above the natural world, and at the same time, human unique features should not be discounted. Bookchin (2010) writes that social ecology recognizes “... the often-overlooked fact that nearly all our present ecological problems arise from deep-seated social problems. Conversely, present ecological problems cannot be clearly understood, much less resolved, without resolutely dealing with problems within society” (p.268).

Environmental problems arise essentially from social problems, especially about domination and hierarchies. As there is social domination, so also there is domination of nature and this needs to be undone, as Bookchin opines. In describing hierarchy, Bookchin (1982) writes that the world has become binary in which the old dominate the young, men dominate women, one ethnic group dominates another, the town dominates the countryside, the mind dominates the body, etc. The group that dominates, DesJardins (2006) interprets Bookchin to say wields power over others and commands obedience from the inferior in a manipulative manner. DesJardins (2006) opines that, unlike the traditional anarchists and Marxists, Bookchin does not see hierarchies as rooted in economic classes, for hierarchies exist even in societies without economic classes. Bookchin (1982) has shown that hierarchy is more than social control, domination, and manipulation; it resides in mental consciousness also as people are oppressed in their minds or consciousness, beliefs, perceptions, and understandings; and as this consciousness pervades people accept a life that they should not accept, a life of drudgery, pain, and hardship while those above them live in bliss. As human beings dominate one another so also they dominate nature. Hay (2002) notes that the two themes of domination and hierarchy mark his social ecology, and his aim is to find a society in which persons enjoy “competent selfhood” (p.288). Hay (2002) avers that Bookchin saw domination and hierarchy as the source of every political pathology, with environmental degradation inclusive (human domination of others is a cause not a consequence of environmental exploitation. Bookchin (1990) argues that society should be free from hierarchical

sensibilities and hierarchies, and humanity should be inserted into the natural world to be an agent to render evolution fully self-conscious and also free, we must not surrender to mindless irrationalism or mysticisms but rather we must be engaged in activism for rationality and freedom, and this is the new science, new technology, and sensibility to create a fully libertarian society.

Bookchin speaks of the “organismic tradition.” DesJardins (2006) explains this to mean the relationships between individuals and their society and emphasizes a middle-ground between both in contrast to those who see individuals as simply products of society, or those who see society as simply a collection of individuals. The reality is that while society shapes individuals and the community impacts the individuals, it is also individuals who form and shape society. Knowing the power of society, individuals have to be deliberately conscious of creating and making history and society and not allow society to unfree them. Human beings need to live free from domination, manipulation, and all forms of constraints and coercion. DesJardins (2006) cites Bookchin to assert that a just society is free from customs and institutions that enshrine domination and control of one group over another, rather it favours decentralized decision-making and individuals cooperate and complement one another.

Hay (2002) indicates that Bookchin emphasizes a “contentious evolutionary teleology” (p. 288). Clark (2008) writes that philosophically, social ecology is dialectical, holistic, and in terms of politics it is decentralized, communitarian, anarchist and affirms libertarian socialism; and its dialectics come from Hegelian, Marxian, and Critical Social Theory tradition; with its organicist and holistic dimensions rooted in Lewis Mumford and Elisee Reclus.

Another element of social ecology that is worth remarking about is its anti-religious and anti-spiritual perspective. Clark (2008) states that while Bookchin and his collaborator Janet Biehl initially were sympathetic to spirituality, they eventually avowedly became anti-spiritual and anti-religious. As Clark (2008) notes he once praised tribal societies' nonduality worldviews, the organic views of animism, the communitarian, libertarian, and ecological viewpoints of radical Christian sects of the early Middle Ages and early Modern period, and metaphyseal and spiritual teleology. Still on this issue, Clark (2008) helps us to understand that from the year 1987, Bookchin became critical of mystical and spiritual elements in ecology seeing the notion of ecofeminist goddesses as presenting women as superior to men, enthroning female chauvinism; and ecologists who reject political activism, accept fatalistic attitudes, encourage anti-immigrant postures, opposing technology and civilization, devaluation of humanity and opting for pristine nature untouched by technology. It is noted by Clark (2008) that he attacked Thomas Berry who saw human presence on earth as demonic but he failed to attend to Berry's notion of human celebration of the universe, capacity for joy and wonder; because of his generalizations and selective attacks he is seen as lacking merit in his attacks. Concerning Biehl, Clark (2008) shows that she was overtly critical of ecofeminist ideas which she saw as fostering subservience, promoting irrational beliefs, and glossing over hierarchical and repressive elements in Neolithic cultures. There are scholars such as Joel Kovel, as Clark (2008) notes who see connections between spirituality and social ecology, and assert that the concept of spirit can help to curb dominance. For David Watson, as Clark (2008) notes, the myths, shamanistic practices, and rituals of tribal societies fostered egalitarianism and cooperative relationships and carried greater truth than techno-scientific cultures

For Bookchin (2010) the state and capitalism has a negative effect in that it is destructive of nature and natural systems. Bookchin (2010) writes: “Unless we realize that the present market society, structured around the brutally competitive imperative of ‘grow or die,’ is a thoroughly impersonal, self-operating mechanism, we will falsely tend to blame technology as such or population growth as such for

environmental problems. We will ignore their root causes, such as trade for profit, industrial expansion, and the identification of ‘progress’ with corporate self-interest” (p. 269).

Situation of Environmental Protection in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta suffers from poor environmental protection. This is the case because of the massive environmental degradation taking place in the Niger Delta that has subjected it to harm and vulnerability. It is the situation in the Niger Delta that this paper argues that social ecology should be applied. The Niger Delta is be-devilled with a lot of social and ecological problems. The Niger Delta is rich in oil and gas resources. A very high percentage of Nigeria’s national income comes from the Niger Delta. The exploration and exploitation of oil and gas resources have also brought consequent problems. One such problem is the massive environmental pollution of the Niger Delta. Much of the oil is drilled by oil multinational corporations. These multinational corporations often care little for the environment of the Niger Delta. In the process of prospecting for oil, they use all types of heavy equipment and seismic gadgets. In prospecting for oil they fell trees and cut pipelines through people’s farmlands, caring less for the consequences. Petroleum fire is also a common occurrence in the Niger Delta. Gabriel and Egege (2022) note that oil companies have caused massive environmental degradation and ecological devastation as they have destroyed farmlands, reduced soil nutrients, vandalized aquatic life, killed fishes and caused the extinction of fishes. Ojakorotu (2010) has named oil companies such as SHELL, Exxon Mobil, Elf, Addax, and other oil companies as culprits in polluting the environment of the Niger Delta. Ekabo (2016) argues that multinational oil companies collaborate with selfish local elites taking away the resources of the region without much in return to the region.

Oil spillage comes from broken and decadent pipelines. The oil companies are quick to blame it on sabotage without properly investigating the cause. When there are oil spillages that pollute the land and marine resources, they can be there for months without cleaning up. Ogoni land which is part of Nigeria’s Niger Delta has suffered so much from the negative effects of both oil exploitation and pollution. The United Nations has said it will take more than 25 years to clean up and remediate the environment of Ogoniland. What is said of Ogoniland is equally applicable to much of the Niger Delta. One of the most degraded regions of the world is the Niger Delta. Anah (2019) quotes Kekong who asserted that “since the beginning of oil explorations in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, the multinational companies have wreaked havoc on neighbouring communities and their environment” (p.8). Anah (2019) using Ughelli as a case study states that oil exploration has led to environmental degradation, infertile soil, low agricultural productivity, destruction of aquatic life, and displacement of people. Najibo and Umukoro (2009) write that the activities of oil companies have devastated the land and caused human insecurity as transportation of oil products causes ecological disturbance, seismic activities cause explosions, pipeline leaks pollute the water, and the terrain is destroyed by blowouts and refinery effluents, alienated lands and marginalized the peasantry. Ekabo (2016) cites Akpor Mudiaga-Odje who writes of the Niger Delta as filled with poverty caused by cruelty, and oil exploration has polluted and endangered people’s lives, youth restiveness and unemployment are the order of the day, oil pipelines run in people’s neighbourhood, and while the federal government sends troops to protect oil facilities it fails to protect the people.

Gas flaring is also an activity that takes place in the Niger Delta. There is hardly any area in the Niger Delta where you go that you will not encounter gas flaring. The oil companies prefer to continue gas flaring and pay fines as it is easier for them. The government in the past has given many deadlines for gas flaring to stop, but unfortunately, it is still occurring. The poisonous gasses from gas flaring have destroyed both plants and animals and also posed health hazards. The lives of many people have been

cut short as a result of gas flaring. Gas flaring has also produced acid rain. Acid rain corrodes people's roofs and houses. Both oil pollution and gas flaring have all led to the destruction of biodiversity and endangered the habitat of different plants, animals, and other organisms. Chinyere (2022) cites the World Bank Global Gas Flaring Reduction of 2012 to state that the gas flaring activities of multinational corporations have destroyed fishing and farming activities and negatively affected the livelihood of people. Ojakorotu (2010) writes that: "Massive oil spills have not only polluted the sources of drinking water available to the people but have also denied them access to safe water for domestic use Other deprivations that the people suffer are in the form of displacements and strangulation of the means to livelihood in a predominantly fishing and agrarian population"(p. 47). Ekabo (2016) cites Dokubo Melford Goodhead to state that: "The creeks are polluted. Gas flares by night and by day, and indeed, every moment of the day for decades running, have wreaked havoc on the health of the people... The Niger Delta is a zone of death" (p.22)

Why it is true that much of the environmental problems in the Niger Delta come from oil exploration and exploitation, and many problems emanate from other actors. In the past, the Niger Delta is known for militant activities. There were groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Avengers, Niger Delta Volunteer Force, Niger Delta Strike Force, etc. Though these groups are still in existence their militant activities have died down. The presidential amnesty initiated by the government of Yar'Adua helped greatly in mitigating the activities of the militants. Faleti (2018) writes that the Presidential Amnesty Programme succeeded greatly in curbing militant activities and scaled down attacks on oil and gas facilities. Militant activities take place not in a vacuum but on the land. Any form of warfare by its nature is inimical to environmental wellness.

Connected to the issue of militancy is that because of the massive negligence of oil-bearing communities, has led to conflicts and at times violence, and youth restiveness. People question how so much wealth is generated from their land and water yet there is little to show for it. Gabriel and Egege (2022) write that the activities of the government and oil companies in the region have precipitated discontentment in the region causing agitations. Ogedi (2022) has equally stated that the Niger Delta conflict is a result of protracted injustice, successive government failures, and failures of oil companies in fully developing the area. Asanebe and Otoo (2022) corroborate the above by stating that: "The ill feeling of neglect, marginalization, environmental degradation, pollution, unemployment, under-development and monumental poverty even in the midst of plenty became the springboard that encouraged" militancy and violent struggle. Najibo and Umukoro (2009) listed some militant activities that have taken place in the Niger Delta on 22 March 2003, 24 December 2004, 2 June 2006, 20 August 2006, 15 June 2008, 19 July 2008, etc. In these and many other activities persons were killed, properties destroyed, and the environment polluted. Uwasomba (2015) writes that: "The stupendous wealth accruing from oil to both the state and the oil multinationals at the expense of the communities and their environment has spawned serious clashes with tragic consequences between the Oil Companies and the host communities of the Niger Delta in Nigeria" (p.338).

Another problem in the Niger Delta is illegal refineries, oil bunkering and oil theft. All these equally have an impact on the environment of the Niger Delta. There is massive oil theft in the region. Ikaonaworio (2022) asserts that oil theft is when people deliberately break pipelines, oil facilities, and their platforms to illegally take crude oil through improvised conduits. It is a massive illegal business in the region and is criminal. Oil thieves care nothing for the environment, all they are interested in is their illicit profits. There are also a lot of illegal artisanal refineries through which crude is transformed into various forms of energy fuel. Ikaonaworio (2022) has noted that these artisanal refining processes do not follow

international best practices and they damage the environment, causing wastage that pollutes the rivers and land.

The fact is that all the factors mentioned in this section have led to the impoverishment of the delta and its cultures and also caused environmental degradation. Instead of the Niger Delta being protected and conserved it is been drained of resources needed for its protection. Government laws and policies to protect the region are often flouted by oil companies. Oil companies rarely do much to protect the delta. If they do the Niger Delta will not be massively degraded as it is. On the path of individuals and groups, not much is done to protect the environment of the Niger Delta as a result of impoverishment and massive suffering that impedes the lives of people. People can rarely think of protection when they lack basic socio-economic rights and necessities of life. There is also the problem of corrupt local elites and some traditional rulers who siphon money meant for the development of their communities.

Applying the Values of Social Ecology to the Niger Delta

Online MSW Programs (2022) states that: “The social ecological perspective posits that many factors from our environment come together to create the unique circumstances that shape who we are, seeking to promote the idea that we are all interdependent and must handle society’s issues in ways that consider all parts of a functional system” (par. 14). According to DesJardins (2006) Bookchin is not clear, vague on the connection between social domination and domination of nature, he even denies any necessary connection; because of this, the practical implication is less persuasive. DesJardins (2006) opines that though Bookchin is not very clear he does see that the connection is more than a mere accident and there is a real historical connection between social hierarchies and nature domination, and so by implication, both should be addressed and addressed one all affect the other. Bookchin as Desjardins (2006) notes has also been critiqued as anthropocentric for affirming that humans as stewards have to direct evolution, and some critics have seen this as humans directing evolution towards their ends. Human beings co-evolved with nature, but they are unique and they should not remove themselves from nature. Bookchin also states that both deep ecology and biocentric ethics degrade human abilities. For Bookchin as DesJardins (2006) notes, humans can purposefully intervene in first nature through society, humans are humanistic and place themselves at the service of natural evolution increasing biotic diversity, diminishing suffering, reducing disasters, and fostering the evolution of ecologically viable life forms. Despite the tensions and arguments against Bookchin, the fact remains as DesJardins (2006) avers that Bookchin reminds us that just as human decisions have contributed to the destruction of nature, they can contribute to ecological flourishing. One of the greatest criticisms of social ecology is from deep ecologists. Crist (2009) writes that as a result of Bookchin the environmental movement has been split into social justice and nature camps for while deep ecologists see anthropocentrism as the root of environmental destruction, social ecologists emphasize human dominance; and he has disparaged its eclectic nature in giving place to primitive ritual, eastern spirituality, etc.

Though not all of the social ecology applies to the Niger Delta, there are aspects of it that can help in creating an ecologically sustainable Niger Delta. Human beings are conscious rational beings who have tremendous powers. Their uniqueness is not for domination and conquest of the earth. They should live benignly on earth. Human beings especially as groups and corporations should realize that their decisions regarding exploration and exploration in the Niger Delta, matter. They should be deliberative and conscious about the decisions that they take to ensure that their decisions foster ecosystemic flourishing in the Niger Delta. It is a symbiotic relationship that humans should have with the natural environment in the Niger Delta. Ogbu (2022) quotes the World Health Organization to state that instead

of humans having a symbiotic relationship with nature they carry out activities to pollute and degrade the environment. This is precisely what is happening in the Niger Delta. Social ecology affirms that though humans are unique they are part of nature and have co-evolved with it. In their uniqueness and consciousness, they have a responsibility to be stewards of nature. From social ecology, it is clear that ecological problems have at their root human domination. Human beings should not be seen as intruders or parasites in nature. There needs to be a deeper recognition on the part of all peoples and companies in the Niger Delta, that humans in the Niger Delta are part of the ecosystem and ecology of the Niger Delta. As they tap the resources of the Niger Delta they should do it in a humane, prudent, and benevolent manner. They should take into consideration the health of ecosystems and the needs of future generations. The Niger Delta should not just be seen as a massive warehouse of resources.

There are a lot of decisions, especially about oil and gas exploration and exploitations in the Niger Delta that are taken in faraway European and American cities in the boardroom that the people of the Niger Delta never participate in. This is unacceptable. Decisions regarding whatever affects the Niger Delta and its people should truly become participatory. The domination of the peoples and cultures of the Niger Delta by multinational oil and gas companies needs to be stopped. Relationships between the peoples of the Niger Delta and shareholders of these oil and gas companies most of whom are in Western countries need to be an empowering one. It should be a relationship of the *I-Thou* relationship to use the world of Martin Buber. Decisions should not just be taken in Abuja between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the oil companies. Decisions taken regarding the Niger Delta should be generated from the grassroots.

One point that is clear from the theory of social ecology is that ecological problems are not just ecological problems. They have a social dimension. It is human beings who cause problems like forestation, noise pollution, human-induced desertification, ecological warfare, dumping of waste into the oceans, gas flaring, etc. Scientific and technological solutions cannot simply solve these problems. They require ethical orientation on the part of human beings. Much of the environmental problems in the Niger Delta are caused by human beings and their decisions. These problems cannot simply be solved with the implementation of more scientific technologies. Human beings in the Niger Delta need to be made aware of the environmental problems that they have caused and that they have a responsibility to ensure that they are solved. Exploitation and domination is taking place in both society and the natural world in the Niger Delta.

Social ecology argues that both exploitation and domination must be eradicated. Even when domination in society does not affect the Niger Delta directly, it can affect it indirectly. Apart from struggles over the gas and oil wealth of the region, individuals and groups struggle over various other issues. There are ethnic rivalries, though many of them can be attributable to the struggle over oil resources. It is debatable if there were no oil in those places if these ethnic groups would fight themselves. These struggles have a way of negatively impacting the natural environment of the region. The United Nations (1992) states that: "Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development. States shall therefore respect international law protecting for the environment in terms of armed conflict and cooperation in its further development, as necessary." When there are conflicts, especially violent ones between militant groups and oil companies, between ethnic militias and oil companies, between one ethnic group and another, etc they hurt the environment. In the process of fighting, trees are destroyed, rivers and streams are polluted with the human blood of those killed, and also the habitat of various birds and animals is destroyed. Many of those engaged in warfare in the Niger Delta, rarely think of the environmental consequences of their fighting. The link between human struggles for ethnic

dominance, militant superiority, and rivalries over the other is not often drawn. This is where social ecology comes into place. Social ecology makes us aware that human dominance also leads to dominance over nature, etc. Brauer (2010) writes: “War affects nature in two ways. The direct effect is the immediate killing of flora and fauna” and species are deprived of elements they need for survival. One of the salient lessons from social ecology is that social problems invariably affect the environment. Take another social problem like the problem of poverty. Poverty is a multidimensional issue. One of the causes of poverty is structural injustice that condemns people to the dregs of society. Poor people often over-depend on nature for instance in some places like the Niger Delta, and Nigeria in general they have to depend on wood from the forest for fuel. The use of wood for fuel is contributing to deforestation in the Niger Delta. It is unacceptable to look at social problems and think that they do not affect the environment. A society that is filled with justice and even development contributes to the overall well-being of people. Such people also invariably can live well in relating to one another and nature. Social justice is imperative for environmental protection. The people of the Niger Delta have suffered from not only environmental degradation, they have also suffered from socio-economic environmental injustice and lack of adequate development of their societies, It becomes difficult for them to fully participate even in their development. This is where viable aspects of social ecology should be taken seriously in the Niger Delta. Bookchin was also very critical of capitalism and the entire market system. Capitalist greed has brought more misery to humans and the degradation of the environment. The environmental exploration of oil and gas resources in the Niger Delta is driven by global capitalist forces. The capitalist exploitation in the Niger Delta should be tamed and morally restrained. In the process of exploitation of oil and gas resources, the well-being of the people and environmental protection should be given more priority than the profit of shareholders.

Conclusion

The paper has examined how social ecology can contribute to environmental protection in the Niger Delta. The paper elucidated the key concepts in the work and looked at the tenets of social ecology and also the situation of environmental protection in the Niger Delta. It was noted that there is poor environmental protection in the Niger Delta. As the paper showed environmental protection is keeping the environment free from whatever could harm it such as pollution, hazards, etc. The Niger Delta is filled with pollution. There are oil spillages and leaks. In the process of oil exploration and exploitation, pipelines are created into the neighbourhood of the people, and there is gas flaring. There is also a high level of militancy against oil companies, which was abated through the amnesty programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria. There is also oil bunkering and oil theft. Environmental laws are often sidetracked by many oil companies. This and many other factors made this paper affirm that there is a low state of environmental protection in the Niger Delta. The paper noted that aspects of social ecology can be applied to the Niger Delta. Social ecology awareness can help to foster the idea that the people of the Niger Delta are an integral part of the natural environment of the Niger Delta. The people though part of nature, have a unique place as they carry mental abilities and consciousness. This places an enormous responsibility on the people and all those engaged in the Niger Delta such as the multinational oil corporations. From social ecology also, there should be the realization that many social problems invariably affect the way that human beings treat nature. If the people of the Niger Delta can take this challenge seriously, and oil and gas companies also corporately act to minimize harm to the environment of the Niger Delta, it will help to create a sustainable Niger Delta.

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