

## Petrol Tanker Disaster, Pipeline Vandalization and Impacts on Regional Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

For many years, the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC depots at different locations around the country have suffered severe product shortages due to the nefarious activities of the vandals, who destroy the pipelines feeding the facilities, however, frequent petrol tanker explosion in the recent times, has adversely affected the supply of the products. Apart from the loss of lives and property and its negative effects on ecosystem, the two activities have made the consumption of the products almost impossible. The study looks into petrol tanker disaster and pipeline vandalization and their impacts on regional development. It employs social learning theory as basis of its theoretical underpinnings. The study examines the causes and consequences of the activities and finds out that the activities have negative effects on development. It therefore recommends appropriate suggestions for its remedies. The study will be of great help to researchers and government agencies.

**Key words:** Tanker disaster; Pipeline vandalisation; Conceptualization and development

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### GENERAL INTRODUCTION: MEANING AND CONCEPTS

Disaster from the etymological perspectives is derived from middle French “disastre” and from Old Italian “disastro” which is turn comes from the Greek pejorative prefix “(dis)” “bad and (aster) “star”, that is disaster meaning “bad star”. The Ancient Greek used to refer to the destruction or reinstruction of a star as a disaster (Korstanje, 2011).

A disaster is a natural or man-made (or technological) hazard resulting in an event or substantial extent causing significant physical damage or destruction, loss of life, or drastic change to the environment. A disaster according to Scheper-Hughes (2003) can be ostensibly defined as any fragile event stemming from events such as earthquakes, flood, catastrophic accidents, fires or explosions. It is a phenomenon that can cause damage to life and property and destroy the economic, social and cultural life of people.

In contemporary academia, disasters are seen as the consequence of inappropriately managed risk. These risks are the product of a combination of both hazards and vulnerability. Hazards that strike in areas with low vulnerability will never become disasters, as in the case of inhabited regions (Aguire & Quaranteli, 2008).

It could be noted that developing countries suffer the greatest costs when a disaster hits – more than 95 percents of all deaths caused by disasters occur in developing countries, and losses due to natural disasters are 20 times greater (as a percentage of GDP in developing countries than in industrialized countries).

On the other hand, man-made disasters are the consequences of technological or human hazards.

Examples include stampedes, fires, transport accidents, industrial accidents, oil spills and nuclear explosions and deliberate attacks, terrorist attack, pipeline vandalization and tanker explosion among others.

In recent times especially in the developing countries as in Nigeria, cases of petrol tanker disasters and pipeline vandalization are rampant. For example, in the Nations Newspaper of 12th February, 2012 as reported by Ibrahim, Joe and Miram, it was reported that 3 killed, 39 vehicles burnt in Lagos due to tanker explosion while trying to scoop petrol in Okogbe, Rivers State on July 13, 2002 (Ikuomola, 2012). The aftermath of petrol disaster has led to loss of precious souls and properties worth millions of naira.

On pipeline vandalization however, for many years, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC depots at different locations around the country have suffered severe product shortages due to the nefarious activities of the vandals who destroy the pipelines feeding the activities. This way, the consumption of the product has been adversely affected due to the inadequate supply.

Until recently, stories about pipeline vandalism and of oil thefts were largely restricted to riverine communities. But the trend has changed dramatically in form and strategy, giving way to more daring and dangerous modes of operation by vandals. While it is no secret that Nigeria is suffering from myriads of problems, the recent upsurge in the theft of crude oil and attendant destruction of oil pipeline has affected global concern.

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## 1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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The issue of pipeline vandalization and petrol tanker disasters syndrome could be said to be a new phenomenon whose appearance in the Nigerian history could be a recent history. It all started with the discovery of crude oil in the southern part of the country but with the previous ruling governments, not taken cognizance of the areas where the resources are being explored most especially in terms of provision of infrastructural facilities and employment generation. The arena for a long time, were abandoned with no meaningful development. Since the people thought government could not help them, youths in most of these areas resulted to vandalization of oil facilities in attempt to make their impact and grievances known.

However, corruption in the country has been a cankerworm that has eaten deeply to the fabric of the nation, most of the petrol tanker disasters could be traced to the fact that in an attempt to cover-up, such terrible evil acts, the outcome has always been frequent tanker disaster.

Giving an insight of the activities of the ubiquitous vandals, Agekameh (2012) reported that in one of the causes, the vandals killed one of the personnel of the Petroleum Corporation Company who went to fix a vandalized pipeline and buried him an unknown grave. It took the intervention of the management of Petroleum Corporation Company which pleaded with community for

several days before they could be shown the grave and the body could be exhumed for a befitting burial.

Since the first fire incidents in Jesse near Sapele in Delta State on October 17<sup>th</sup> 1998, where an estimated 1, 200 people died, many more people have died particularly as a result of the activities of pipeline vandals. These people met untimely death through sudden and devastating explosions resulting in huge inferno, men, women, old and young even toddlers have been roasted!

A diary of pipeline explosions as according to Ikuomola (2012), indicated that on July 11th 2000, a pipeline explosion killed 250 villagers in Warri, November 30th, 2000, a leaking oil products pipeline caught fire at a bench head of Ebute near Lagos, killing at 60 people, June 19th, 2003, an oil pipeline punctured by thieves exploded North of Abia State Capital Umuahia, killing 125 villagers, September 17th 2004, dozens of people are killed in a pipeline explosion in Lagos after thieves tried to siphon petrol belonging to NNPC. May 12th 2006, a pipeline explosion at Inagbe Beach on the outskirts of Lagos kills more than 250 people. December 26th 2006, several hundred people were burnt alive when fuel from a vandalized pipeline explodes in Abule Egba district of Lagos, Nigeria Red Cross recorded 200 bodies. December 26th 2007, at least 45 people burnt to death on the outskirts of Lagos when fuel were siphoned from a buried pipeline caught fires. May 15th 2008, at least 100 people killed and several injured when fuel from a pipeline ruptured by an earthmover explodes in a village near Lagos. The recent one occurred in Okogbe of River State on July 12th, 2012, where 95 deaths were recorded.

Despite the huge amount of resources lost to pipeline and truck disaster coupled with the loss of precious souls that are innumerable, truck disaster and pipeline vandalization remain one of the cankerworms issues in the Nigeria history that requires an urgent attention and hence, the needs for this study.

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## 2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

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The aim of this study is to examine the incidences of petrol tanker disaster and pipeline vandalization and their impacts on regional development of Nigeria. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are set: To examine some cases of pipeline and tanker disasters in Nigeria, to examine the causes of such vandalization and tanker disasters, to look into the consequences of these act. To recommend appropriate measures in tackling down or reducing the ugly incidences.

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## 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

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The study employs a social learning theory which could be traced back the work of Robert. L. Burges and Ronald,

L. Akers in 1966, as presented in their book entitled “A differential association-reinforcement theory of criminal behavior”. Social learning theory is a general theory of crime and criminality and has been used to explain a diverse array of criminal behaviours. The theory as proposed by Akers is centred on the idea that ‘the same learning process in a context of social structure, interaction, and situation produces both conforming and defiant behaviour. The difference lies in the direction of the balance of influences on the behavior (Akers & Sellers, 2004).

Social learning theory opines that persons will engage in criminal and deviant behavior is increased and the probability of their conforming to the norm is decreased when they differentially associate with others who commits criminal’s behavior and espouse definitions favourable to it, are relatively more exposed in-person or symbolically to salient criminal deviant models. The conceptualization of social learning theory embodies within its four fundamental premises that include differential associations, definitions, differential reinforcement and imitation.

Differential association is a criminology theory that looks at the acts of criminal as learned behaviours (Sutherland 1974). It could be understood as comprising two important dimensions. The first dimension is behavioural-interactive and explains deviance as being produced through direct association and interaction with others who engage in certain kinds of behaviour as well as indirect association and identification with more distant reference group.

The people or group with whom an Individual is in social contact, either directly or indirectly, are seen as providing the social context under which each of the four premise of social learning theory functions, that is, within this social context, individuals are exposed to varying definitions acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. It is generally that the timing, length, frequency and nature of the contact are important determinant of behaviour.

Definitions, as they are to be understood under social learning theory, are an individual’s own values and attitudes about what is and is not acceptable behaviour, that is they are orientations, rationalizations, definitions of the situation, and other evaluative and moral attitudes that define the commission of as an act as right or wrong good or bad, desirable or undesirable justified or unjustified. These attitudes and values are learned and reinforced through the problem of differential association.

On differential reinforcement, it is the process by which individuals experience and anticipate the consequences of their behaviours. That is, a person’s actions are in part determined by what they perceive the consequences of their action or lack of action will be “whether individuals will refrain from or commit a crime at any given time (and whether they will continue

or desire from doing it in the future) depends on the past, present and anticipated future rewards and punishments for their actions” (Akers & Sellers, 2004).

However on imitation, is the notion that individuals engage in behaviour that they previously witnessed others doing. The extent to which behaviours are imitated is determined in large part by the “characteristics of the models, the behaviour observed, and the observed consequences of the behaviour.

The literature has indicated that witnessing the actions of others, in particular people that are close to us can affect our participation in both conformity and non conformity behaviours (Donnerstein and Linz, 1995). On why the problem of petrol tanker disaster and pipeline vandalization persist, Nations Newspaper 13th February, 2013 opined asides the fact that young men and women are being attracted to it every day, it is even more worrisome that parents are now introducing their children to the business, making it a family business while the forest give the alleged, oil thieves cover from the public, the river, provides them a seemingly solid alibi to prowl the areas disguising as fisherman.

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#### 4. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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There is no doubt that pipeline vandalization is one of the biggest challenges confronting the country the country today. The harassment, intimidation and perennial killings of people by these vandals underscore the desperation, viciousness and callousness with which the borrowing business is being carried out. The illegal business is also believed to have led to the death of no fewer than 6,000 people due to fire incidents that resulted from pipeline vandalism in the last five years.

While some people believed that the fire incidents resulting from petroleum pipeline vandalism on the ruptured pipelines, the affected oil companies in their own defense, always attributed it to the activities of pipeline vandals. Regrettably, the activities of the vandals might have led to the unplanned exit of some oil companies in the country, which in turn has drastic effects on the economy.

The economic downturn in the country could have made many people to seek alternative means of survival through crime and criminality. In this regard, the very lucrative oil business must have been of topmost priority for them. Pipeline vandalism, therefore, has become almost an all-comers game because of the seeming “care” of stealing petroleum products. Though, the pipelines are buried deep inside the ground and many in swamps forest, the vandal have devised various indigenous methods to breach the pipeline. Once this is done, they divert the products for their legal business.

In most cases, trucks are used to load illegal products to be sold to willing buyers in the black market. The buyers could be owners of filling stations or other

unscrupulous Nigerians acting as middlemen for end users. When it is not convenient to use trucks, drums or jerry cans are used, and then taken in large quantities to secret places where the buyers come to take delivery. It is the process of siphoning these products that 'avoidable' fire incidents occur.

In a society where money is worshipped and where poverty is widespread, oil theft, generally, is a very lucrative business in Nigeria therefore, the tendency to look for the other ways. This is more so if would-be or potential whistle-blower is given a piece of the action to keep body and soul together. It is noteworthy that each time pipeline vandal are paraded on network television, it is usually the foot soldiers from the dregs of the society, who non errands for the barons that get caught. The godfathers usually lie low, while their stooges are being paraded half-naked in public.

Moreover, the inability of the government to attend to the problem of unemployment is another factor responsible for the pipeline vandalization and invariably pipeline or fire disaster in Nigeria. Day in day out, graduates from the tertiary institutions are coming out without any place to absorb them either in form of skilled or unskilled or semi skilled. It is saddening and disheartening that government cannot boast to have employed 10% out of the graduates from the tertiary institutions in the last ten years. An adage says "an idle hand is a devil's workshop", majority of these youths now take destiny in their various hands and the outcome is, getting money through illicit and illegal means.

Asides, the fact that young men and women are being attracted to it every day, it is even more worrisome that parents are now introducing their children to the business, making it a family business. According to the Nations Newspaper of 23rd February, 2003 citing the recent vandalization of pipeline in Arepo, Ogun State, the paper was of the opinion that "Nigeria may be in for a big trouble if nothing is done to stop this business". The major concern to the security agencies is the seeming ingenuity of the cartels to evade detection while the forest give the alleged oil thieves, cover from the public.

Their mode of operation is simple armed with several 25-litres Jerry cans; the suspected oil thieves tie the kegs together with strong rope, before filling them with stolen oils. The kegs are then dropped into rivers and tied to the canoe. With their loot under water and paddled away with canoe, they look every bit like fishermen. The stolen fuel is then loaded into waiting trucks for onward transmission to target outlets.

At other times when their operators turn ugly, the suspected oil thieves adopt measures that are aimed at obliterating any evidence of their illegal business. Sometimes, the forests are replete with wreckage of trucks and other kinds of vehicles which were deliberately set ablaze by the thieves to avoid being traced or detected. What happens most of the time is that whenever a vehicle that is being used to transport stolen fuel breaks down

and time is running out of them, they deliberately set the vehicle on fire to make sure that nobody traces it to the owners. The effects of this are great, most especially on atmosphere and ecosystem.

The consequences of this pipeline vandalization are great. A review of literature show that the country loses a whopping sum of N1.1 trillion (&7 billion) annually to oil theft. The International Energy Agency (IEA) which gave this estimate in a monthly report on oil production around the world also said Royal Dutch Shell Plc, the country largest oil producer, had given hints that its quarterly results would be down by about 20 percent as a result of pipeline vandalization activities.

On tanker disaster, majority of the causes could be traced to the negligence on the part of the drivers. Most of the tankers drivers are used to drugs as means of renewing their strength. Also, most of the drivers are illiterate that could hardly recognize the road signs while most prefer to travel in the nights having forgotten that nature could not be cheated consequently, weariness and tiredness could easily set in. On the part of the vehicle, mechanical faults could not be ruled out. According to Ibrahim et. al (2012), the tanker explosion could be traced to non-suitability of the tyres of the tankers. It is quite unfortunate that on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2012 it was reported in the Nations newspaper that 3 killed, 39 vehicles burnt in Lagos tanker explosion due to loss of one of the tyres of tanker and the negligence on the part of the driver to stop and rectified the problem.

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## 5. WAYS OF REDUCING PETROL TANKER DISASTER AND PIPELINE VANDALIZATION

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Pipeline vandalization and petrol tanker disaster have become some of the numerous problems of Nigeria that need an urgent attention consequently, the following suggestions for their reduction are offered: Corruption is a major cankerworm that has eaten deeply to the fabric of a nation especially in Nigeria. There is corruption at all levels of government and even governments both past and previous seem not to have taken it seriously, this has paved ways for people to be committing crimes with impunity including vandalization of pipeline without being made to face the music. Even, where these vandals were caught and arrested, their godfathers will come to release them. This needs to be stopped.

Moreover, it seems government has failed to perform its functions in the areas of welfare provision for its citizens. The issue of employment has not been taken seriously and with people (youths) graduating from schools without no vital means of survival, majority take their destiny in their hands and engage in such illegal and unlawful business as oil thefts in order to survive consequently, provision of employment should be taken seriously.

It is quiet unfortunate that the poverty level in the country is high and not many could afford a daily food

consequently, people resort to any means for survival. Even in the areas where the oil is being explored, the areas seem to have been neglected in terms of the provision of infrastructural facilities such as: good roads, drinkable water, better health services, and education among others hence, the people resort to vandalization of pipeline to express their grievances. It is suggested however, that pragmatic infrastructural development be enhanced in the oil producing areas to reduce the incidences of emerging pseudo-leaders known as militant. As parts of suggestions for vandalization of pipeline, it is suggested that stiffer punishments be met for the pipeline vandalization offenders. Laws could be enacted and offenders caught in these act could be given a life jail sentence to serve as better deterrence.

On petrol tanker disaster reduction, it is suggested that there should be improvement on road rehabilitation and proper maintenance of the roads by the agencies responsible while the petrol tankers drivers be made to strictly adhere to road signs and signals and driving at late nights be discouraged. Also driving under the influences of drugs or alcohol be discouraged while the fire service agencies be made functional and more fire service stations be constructed across the country so as to save should in case there is fire outbreaks however, people should be disaster conscious. A tanker with fuel is a bomb waiting to explode. Our people should understand the danger they exposed to and hence be vigilant.

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## CONCLUSION

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Both petrol tanker disaster and pipeline vandalization are threat to both regional and national development. During the two processes, properties worth millions of Naira that ought to have been meant to develop a country are lost while precious souls, breadwinners of families are equally lost. It is on this note that it is suggested that all hands must be on deck so as to reduce the incidences. This is necessary so as to save the country from the impending dangers. All the stakeholders in the Nigeria development agenda be made accountable.

Such stakeholders involve the people that should be imbibe the spirit of patriotism, the security agencies such as the police, Navy, Army, Civil Defence Corps, Fire Service, the Judiciary and the Emergency Management Vanguard be made alive to their responsibilities.

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