

# Infrastructural Development, Security, and Prevention of Oil Theft in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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## Abstract:

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, rich in oil resources, grapples with ongoing challenges related to infrastructural development and security, particularly concerning oil theft. This paper explores the complex relationship between these factors and their implications for the region's stability and growth. It posits that inadequate infrastructure and ineffective security frameworks are significant contributors to the rampant oil theft that plagues the regions, which in turn hampers economic development, environmental sustainability, and community welfare. Infrastructural deficiencies such as poor road networks, lack of electricity, and inadequate educational and healthcare facilities create an environment where criminal activities, including oil theft, can thrive. Many residents, feeling neglected by the government, may resort to illegal means to improve their economic situations. This cycle of poverty and crime undermines the region's potential for sustainable growth. Additionally, weak security measures exacerbate the problem. The absence of a robust security framework allows criminal groups to operate with relative impunity. Limited government presence and inadequate law enforcement resources further compound the situation, making it difficult to deter oil theft effectively. Moreover, when communities perceive security forces as antagonistic or unresponsive to their needs, it can lead to a breakdown of trust, further complicating efforts to combat criminal activities. To address these challenges, the paper argues for enhanced infrastructural development as a foundational strategy. Investments in transportation, healthcare, and education can provide legitimate economic opportunities for local communities, reducing the allure of oil theft. Furthermore, establishing robust security measures, including better surveillance and community policing, can protect oil infrastructure and deter criminal activities. Engaging local communities in these security efforts can foster cooperation and build trust, creating a more cohesive approach to security.

**Keywords:** Infrastructural Development, Oil theft, Security, Niger Delta.

## Introduction:

Infrastructural Development is the key driver for progress across Africa and a critical enabler for productivity and sustainable economic growth. It contributes significantly to human development, poverty reduction, and the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Developmental Goals. Investment in infrastructure is needed in

Niger Delta and vast infrastructural deficit is a constraint on the region's growth and development as the region is significant to Nigeria's economic progress. The Niger Delta, an economically vital region in Nigeria, boasts significant oil reserves that account for nearly 90% of the nation's foreign exchange earnings.

Despite this wealth, the region suffers from severe socio-economic challenges, including widespread poverty and unemployment, as well as extensive environmental degradation. Poverty levels in parts of the Niger Delta can reach as high as 60%, significantly higher than the national average of 40% (World Bank, 2021; National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Youth unemployment also exceeds 50% in various communities. Traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming have been adversely affected by oil spills and other environmental damage resulting from oil extraction activities. Infrastructural development in the Niger Delta has been insufficient, especially given the region's economic contributions. The Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), established in 1992, initially aimed to improve infrastructure and socio-economic conditions. However, it was dissolved in 2000 due to corruption and inefficiency. Its successor, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), was formed to continue promoting sustainable development through initiatives such as road construction, electrification projects, and educational support. Despite these efforts, the NDDC has faced significant criticism for project delays, corruption, and mismanagement. Many road and electrification projects remain uncompleted, and essential services are still lacking as of 2023 (Igbokwe, 2021).

There is inherent correlation and nexus from Oil theft, deplorable infrastructural development and rising human insecurity in the Niger Delta. Human insecurity in the Niger Delta is a direct consequence of oil and gas activities and its poor infrastructure resilience (Umar & Othman, 2017). This research asserts that the factors that cause Oil theft, deplorable infrastructural development and rising risk to human insecurity problems are caused by poor governance and politics, leadership and resource curse corruption. The failure to address underlying causes of socio-economic, environmental, political and poor governance issues makes resolving the insecurity problem difficult.

Case studies of communities like Ogoni and Gbaramatu demonstrate that, despite their proximity to oil production facilities, they continue to lack basic infrastructure. In Ogoni, decades of oil extraction by major companies have caused severe environmental damage, yet the community still struggles with poor road networks, inadequate healthcare, and a lack of clean water (UNEP, 2011). Similarly, Gbaramatu Kingdom, home to several oil facilities, faces dilapidated infrastructure and limited access to electricity despite the immense wealth generated from its oil resources. These infrastructural deficits perpetuate poverty and deepen the socio-economic disparity between oil-producing communities and other parts of the country. Oil theft, or "bunkering," is a major threat to the region's stability and economic development. It is estimated that Nigeria loses about \$3 billion annually due to oil theft and pipeline vandalism, with the Niger Delta being the epicenter of these activities (Nduka, 2023). The region's network of waterways and swamps allows for easy access to pipelines, and inadequate monitoring further complicates efforts to combat the issue. Additionally, the involvement of criminal networks, militant groups, and corrupt security personnel in the illegal oil trade poses significant challenges to securing oil installations.

In response, the Nigerian government has deployed military and law enforcement agencies, including the Joint Task Force (JTF), to protect critical oil infrastructure. Private security firms, such as TANTITA Security Services Limited, have also emerged to address the security challenges. TANTITA has played a role in protecting oil installations, gathering intelligence, and engaging with local communities to reduce oil theft (Ochei, 2022). For instance, its interventions in areas like Nembe Creek and Bonny led to a 30% reduction in oil theft incidents between 2021 and 2023, illustrating the effectiveness of community-driven security strategies (Ezenwa, 2022). However, these measures encounter significant hurdles due to the region's complex socio-political dynamics, including longstanding grievances against the government and oil

companies. Some security efforts face resistance from local communities, which view external forces as oppressive rather than protective. Reports of human rights abuses by security forces have further strained relations, leading to violent confrontations and deepening mistrust between communities and the government (International Crisis Group, 2021).

The ongoing issues of infrastructural deficits and insecurity in the Niger Delta underscore the need for comprehensive solutions that extend beyond security interventions. Community-driven development programs, increased transparency in resource management, and political commitment to addressing the root causes of poverty are essential for improving the region's conditions. Ensuring equitable distribution of oil revenues, investing in infrastructure, and empowering local communities through meaningful participation in decision-making processes can alleviate the feelings of neglect and disenfranchisement. Consequently, the following research questions arise:

- i. What are the Security Challenges in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between Inadequate infrastructural deficit and oil theft in the Niger Delta Region.
- iii. What are the Strategies for Combating Oil Theft in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?
- iv. How Effectiveness are the Strategies in combating oil theft in the Niger Delta Region?

### **Conceptual Framework:**

#### **Concept of Infrastructural Development:**

Infrastructural Development is the key driver for progress across Africa and a critical enabler for productivity and sustainable economic growth. It contributes significantly to human development, poverty reduction, and the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Developmental Goals. Investment in infrastructure is needed in Niger Delta and vast infrastructural deficit is a constraint on the region's growth and development as

Infrastructural development is a critical component of economic growth and societal well-being. Defined in various scholarly terms, Ofori (2007) describes it as the construction and improvement of foundational facilities and systems such as transportation, energy, and telecommunications that support economic activities. Aschauer (1989) emphasizes the significance of public capital, asserting that infrastructure enhances productivity by facilitating the flow of goods and services. Friedmann (1966) characterizes infrastructural development as the establishment of physical and organizational structures that support societal functioning, ultimately improving living standards. Hall (1998) highlights it as the creation and maintenance of essential facilities that underpin economic performance. Baker (2001) further defines it as the process of building and upgrading services that enhance community quality of life. Rodrigue et al. (2006) view infrastructural development as encompassing networks and systems that provide essential services for daily living, acting as a backbone for economic integration. Hodge and Greve (2007) describe it as the planning, financing, and implementation of physical structures and services to meet societal needs. Similarly, Gibbons (2004) states that it involves the enhancement of critical structures that promote social and economic progress. Akinwumi (2012) focuses on strategic investment in physical assets vital for productivity and economic development. Zhang (2009) defines it as the systematic enhancement of physical structures that facilitate market access, while Bello-Imam (2001) discusses the management of infrastructure to support socio-economic development. Collectively, these definitions underscore the multifaceted nature of infrastructural development and its pivotal role in fostering economic and social progress.

In the context, of this research, Oil and Gas Infrastructure consists of a wide range of interdependences such as stovepipes, pipelines, refineries, storage tanks, distribution networks, personnel, roads and transportation systems including onshore and offshore rigs/platforms,

electric power, information and telecommunication technology and oil tankers and barges.

### **Current State of Infrastructure in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria:**

Practical cases of infrastructural deficiencies can be observed in the host communities of Ogoni and Gbaramatu in the Niger Delta, which illustrate the socio-economic impact of such challenges. The Ogoni region, despite its proximity to oil production facilities and decades of oil extraction, continues to suffer from significant infrastructural shortcomings. The community's road network is in a state of disrepair, making transportation challenging, especially during the rainy season. This not only hinders the movement of goods and people but also inflates the cost of living and deters businesses from investing in the area due to increased logistics costs (UNEP, 2011). For instance, the lack of proper roads between Bodo and Bonny has made access to essential services, such as healthcare and education, difficult for local residents, leading to frequent disruptions in school attendance and limited access to medical care.

Similarly, Gbaramatu Kingdom, another oil-producing area, faces a dire situation with respect to basic infrastructure. The community has limited access to electricity, which is inconsistent and unreliable even when available. This electricity shortfall significantly hampers economic activities, including small-scale businesses and artisanal work that depend on power supply, such as welding and cold storage for fish. The situation has left many residents to rely on costly and polluting generators for power, further increasing the cost of doing business (Eke et al., 2019). The lack of electricity also limits the potential for industrial diversification beyond oil-related activities, as investors are discouraged by the high operational costs associated with power generation.

Healthcare services in Gbaramatu are also inadequate, with few functional health facilities and a shortage of qualified medical personnel.

This has resulted in limited access to essential healthcare services, forcing residents to travel long distances for medical treatment. The poor healthcare infrastructure exacerbates the health challenges in the region, including high maternal and child mortality rates (Aigbiremolen et al., 2018). Educational facilities in Gbaramatu are similarly underdeveloped, with schools lacking basic amenities such as functional classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, which hampers the quality of education. As a result, students from these communities often lag behind their peers from better-equipped areas in terms of academic performance and skill acquisition (Nwajiuba, 2020).

These cases exemplify how infrastructural deficiencies not only exacerbate poverty but also perpetuate a cycle of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta. Poor infrastructure deters local and foreign investments, further limiting economic growth opportunities. Businesses face high operational costs, and the uncertain environment discourages potential investors, perpetuating economic stagnation and high unemployment rates (Abang&Usang, 2019). Addressing these infrastructural challenges in communities like Ogoni and Gbaramatu is crucial to unlocking the region's economic potential and fostering sustainable development, as improvements in transportation, electricity, healthcare, and education infrastructure are essential for creating a more conducive environment for economic activities and investments.

### **Concept of Oil Theft:**

Oil theft in Nigeria is considered to be the illegal appropriation of crude or refined oil products from the pipelines and other oil facilities. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the term Oil theft encompasses all acts involving bunkering, including diversion and smuggling of oil and unauthorized loading of ships. Oil theft, commonly is the unlawful extraction and appropriation of crude oil from pipelines, refineries, or storage facilities without the consent of the rightful owners, typically motivated by profit (Nduka, 2023). It involves tapping into

pipelines to siphon crude oil, which is subsequently sold on the black market, leading to significant economic losses for the state and oil companies (Ikelegbe, 2018). This practice is characterized as a form of resource misappropriation, undermining legitimate economic activities and contributing to corruption and lawlessness in oil-rich regions (Ochei, 2022). Oil theft can also be seen as economic sabotage, as individuals or groups illegally exploit oil resources, negatively impacting government revenue and local economies (Ugochukwu & Adebayo, 2020). Moreover, it encompasses not only the act of stealing oil but also the resulting environmental degradation caused by pipeline vandalism, which leads to spills and contamination of land and waterways (Akpoborie, 2019). Oil theft is a criminal activity involving illicit operations targeting oil infrastructure, often executed by organized crime syndicates or community militias (Obi, 2018). This phenomenon contributes to socio-economic instability in regions reliant on oil production, perpetuating poverty and underdevelopment (Ikelegbe, 2018). It constitutes a significant aspect of the underground economy, where stolen oil is traded in unregulated markets, often evading taxation (Nduka, 2023). Additionally, oil theft reflects a conflict-induced activity, where groups engage in stealing oil as a means of financing resistance against state authorities or oil companies (Obi, 2018). Lastly, it serves as a community response to perceived marginalization and inequity, with locals sometimes resorting to illegal extraction as a form of protest against the socio-economic impacts of the oil industry (Ugochukwu & Adebayo, 2020).

### **Security Challenges in the Niger Delta:**

Security is the protection from, or resilience against, potential harm (or other unwanted coercion), security also means safety, as well as the measures taken to be safe or protected. For the context of this research, Insecurity is defined as where local and national security architecture is overwhelmed by incompatible demands of ethnic, socio-economic and religious forces that are

sufficient enough to disrupt the safety and activities of the people and infrastructure.

Insecurity in the Niger Delta is a complex issue that serves as both a cause and a consequence of oil theft. Armed groups in the region frequently engage in oil theft as a means to fund their operations or to express dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions that persist in their communities. This cycle of violence and crime has created a volatile security environment characterized by frequent clashes between security forces and militant groups, further destabilizing the region (Abam&Ayanru, 2023). The pervasive presence of these armed groups not only exacerbates the security challenges but also deters potential investments in the area. Investors are often wary of the risks associated with operating in a region marked by violence and uncertainty.

As noted by the International Crisis Group (2021), the ongoing conflict and instability significantly hinder economic development efforts, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and violence. The report highlights that many businesses are reluctant to set up operations in the Niger Delta due to fears of sabotage, kidnapping, and extortion, which are prevalent in areas dominated by militant activity. Moreover, the socio-economic conditions that fuel dissatisfaction among the youth contribute to the recruitment of individuals into armed groups. According to a study by the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER, 2022), high unemployment rates and limited access to education and healthcare create an environment where individuals feel marginalized and disenfranchised. In this context, joining militant groups appear as one of the few viable options for securing economic and social benefits. The research emphasizes that addressing these root socio-economic issues is critical for stabilizing the region and reducing reliance on criminal activities, including oil theft.

The clash between security forces and militant groups further complicates efforts at infrastructural development. Security operations, often marked by heavy-handedness, can lead to

civilian casualties and widespread displacement, exacerbating grievances against the state and oil companies. A report by Amnesty International (2020) indicates that military operations aimed at combating oil theft frequently result in human rights abuses, alienating local communities and undermining trust in government institutions. This dynamic not only fuels further unrest but also complicates the implementation of development projects intended to improve living conditions in the Niger Delta.

Particularly in communities such as Odi in Bayelsa State and Ogoniland in Rivers State, illustrates how oil theft exacerbates instability in the region. Odi's history is marked by violent clashes between armed groups and security forces, notably the 1999 military operation in response to the killing of police officers by suspected militants. This intervention resulted in widespread destruction, civilian casualties, and displacement, fueling long-term grievances against the state. The ongoing environmental degradation and lack of economic opportunities have continued to stoke local discontent, with armed groups using these conditions to justify oil theft and attacks on oil infrastructure. These tensions have deterred potential investments and disrupted efforts to develop infrastructure, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and violence.

Similarly, Ogoniland has long been a center of conflict due to severe environmental damage from oil spills and gas flaring. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and other groups have protested the exploitation of local resources without adequate compensation or environmental remediation. This unresolved conflict has fueled militant activities and oil theft as locals seek to reclaim a share of the region's resources. The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) 2011 report highlighted the extensive environmental damage in Ogoniland, emphasizing that the lack of clean water, farmland, and healthcare services has deepened socio-economic frustrations. The presence of armed groups, such as the Niger Delta Avengers, has led to violent clashes with security forces,

further hindering environmental cleanup efforts and infrastructural development aimed at addressing the region's socio-economic issues. These examples underscore the urgent need to address the root causes of insecurity through comprehensive socio-economic interventions, including environmental remediation, social service provision, and meaningful dialogue with local stakeholders, to break the cycle of violence and foster sustainable development.

In response to these challenges, it is imperative for the government to adopt a more comprehensive approach that includes dialogue with local stakeholders, community development initiatives, and a focus on socio-economic empowerment. The Presidential Amnesty Programme, for instance, aims to rehabilitate former militants by providing vocational training and financial support. However, its effectiveness has been questioned due to issues of mismanagement and lack of sustained political will (Igbokwe, 2021).

### **An Assessment of Inadequate infrastructure and oil theft in the Niger Delta:**

Infrastructural inadequacies have profound implications for oil theft in the Niger Delta, where poor road networks and insufficient surveillance systems facilitate criminal access to pipelines and enable thieves to carry out their activities with relative ease. Most of the Niger Delta communities react aggressively because they are unable to access legitimate source of livelihood to provide for their daily needs. Activities of the oil and gas industry threaten their sources of livelihood leading to civil dissent and resistance that contributes to the factors of insecurity. Oil and Gas insecurity issues are totality of human and natural resources divided into 3; primary secondary and tertiary sub-sets to cover the wide range of issues associated with it. The onshore oil and gas pipeline infrastructure insecurity is related to concern about the stability, safety, and protection of pipelines that transport oil and gas fluid over land (Talus, 2011). Thus it increased exposure to physical attacks, terrorism, sabotage, illegal bunkering, theft, cyber attacks technological vulnerabilities, regulatory policy

challenges, environmental pollution and climate change, in Nigeria is a cause for worry. This has become the central focus in the geo-political, ethnic and economic debates across Nigeria and has been reflected in many resources-rich countries in the Global south.

Oil theft and vandalism of the Niger Delta's pipelines entails physical human disruptions and sabotage against infrastructural development. Oil theft and vandalism is partly motivated by the deplorable state of human security in the Niger Delta (Aluko, 2015; Ekpenyong, 2010; Madubuko, 2017; Owen, 2004). Other problem such as poor governance (In terms of policy conflicts, legislative tensions, and lack of investment in Research and Development) and Incompetent leadership structures created by the British colonialist (Alabi, 2013).

The process of oil and gas production, pipeline operation, vandalism oil bunkering and oil spills have killed many people including pipeline vandals, oil thieves and bystanders Goodman et al., 2016; Igbinovia, 2014). These incidences have also caused substantial damage to the ecosystem especially marine life and increased greenhouse gas emission in Niger Delta region as it has in many countries in Global South like Sudan Equatorial Guinea and Venezuela (Alabi, 2013). However, Kuwait, Qatar and Brazil appear to have reasonably managed to share and use benefits from oil and gas to trigger some measure of socio-economic and infrastructural development (Rizzo, 2016).

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said in Nigeria where for instance over 260 people were killed in Ilado and about 269 others at Abula Egba between May and December of 2016 due to corruption, theft, oil spills and operational failures (Igbinovia, 2014; Mathias, 2015). A technical failure also killed 3 people in Bayelsa during the repairs of the ENI oil pipelines in 2016 (Owolabi, 2016) on top of stagnated infrastructural development. Other threat and risks to oil and gas activities and infrastructure are natural disasters, climate change and corrosion all of which have had devastating effect on the local communities and the

environment (BTC Corporation, 2014, Ubong et al., 2010; Watchet, 2012).

It is worth nothing that continued oil theft has contributed to preventing Nigeria from achieving the OPEC production quota for many years. A fluctuation in oil and gas production in Nigeria has hovered between 700,000 and 2.7 million barrels per day over the last 21 years, putting Nigeria at a considerable disadvantage in terms of oil and gas revenue (Esiedesa, 2021; NBS Report, 2017; NEITI, 2015; NNPC Report, 2017, 2016). Since 2007, it is believed there have been almost 15,000 ACTs of oil theft and vandalism across the Niger Delta (Ibid). Although there is no reliable standardized model for calculating the level of damages and gathering different views on the impact of oil and gas activities on local communities. However, a caveat in the Petroleum Act No. 35 (353) set out the framework mechanism for the protection of oil and gas pipeline infrastructure against oil theft but to no avail (Igbinovia, 2014; Onuoha, 2008). The activities of militants like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and recently the Niger Delta Avenger (NDA) at various times, exposed the poor infrastructure resilience as well as demonstrated the capacity to reduce global crude oil supply and threaten peace and security (Kulungu, 2021; Moody, 2016).

However, The International Crisis Group (2021) highlights that the absence of effective transportation and communication infrastructure significantly aids the movement of stolen oil, complicating the government's ability to respond swiftly to theft incidents. A report by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) underscores that the lack of reliable infrastructure contributes to the country's staggering losses due to oil theft, estimated at billions of dollars annually (NNPC, 2022).

The poor state of infrastructure not only hampers the monitoring capabilities of security agencies but also creates an environment conducive to oil theft. For example, thieves often exploit dilapidated roads to transport stolen oil to illegal refineries or markets, thereby evading detection

by law enforcement (Nduka, 2023). According to Ugochukwu and Adebayo (2020), such infrastructural weaknesses exacerbate the challenges faced by government agencies in tracking illegal activities, leading to a cycle of impunity. Moreover, inadequate surveillance systems further complicate efforts to combat oil theft. Research indicates that the presence of comprehensive monitoring technology, such as drones and satellite imagery, could enhance the detection of illegal activities, yet these technologies are often lacking in the region (Adeniyi, 2021). Consequently, improving infrastructure particularly road networks and surveillance capabilities is vital for enhancing monitoring and enforcement efforts against oil theft.

Addressing these infrastructural deficiencies is not merely an operational necessity but a critical step toward fostering a secure environment for legitimate oil operations in the region. By investing in improved infrastructure, the government can create barriers that deter criminal activities, making it increasingly difficult for thieves to operate effectively (International Crisis Group, 2021; NNPC, 2022). Thus, the enhancement of infrastructure is essential for both mitigating oil theft and promoting sustainable economic development in the Niger Delta.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The frustrate-Aggressive Displacement Theory (FADT) provides the theoretical and explanatory framework for this research to contribute to the body of knowledge (Dollard et al., 1939). Also, this research proposes Community Neglect Aggression Displacement Theory CNADT to support the FADT hypothesis (Bergstresser, 2017; Coleman, 2015; Etemire, 2016; Etete, 2017; Okonta, 2016). While FADT point out the people reactively when prevented from achieving their set objectives. CNADT notes that people will react aggressively when displaced from sources of their socio-economic independence and issues are neglected and unresolved by the government and private oil firms. When local communities suffer more hunger, decreased income, unemployment

and impoverishment they will become reactive and this provokes them to displace aggression against oil firms and the government through oil theft and by vandalizing pipelines,

Applying FADT theory illuminates a deeper understanding of the reasons and mechanism by which the underlying causes of discontent and resentment are understood. Whether they be socio-economic, environmental or political and highlighting how this led some individual and local communities to support violent aggression and vandalism of the pipelines in Niger Delta.

The negative impact of oil and gas extraction combined with the other underlying causes leads to frustration and displacement of aggression against onshore oil and gas pipeline infrastructure. In other words creates tensions and exposes the infrastructure to poor resilience. This violence has serious socio-economic, security and environmental implications thus triggering a vicious cycle of violence and insecurity problems that is difficult to break. Many underlying issues are the root causes of the vandalism of the onshore oil and gas pipeline infrastructure. This discourse highlights that there are many innovative instrumental policies in the oil and gas sector as found in the recent Petroleum Industry Act 2022. The Act contains inherent policy and organizational tensions and conflicts that are problematic to disentangle and resolve. Some of these issues are socio-economic disparity and resource exploitation, land, and fishing water displacement and loss of legitimate source of livelihood, cultural and socio-cultural displacement and inequitable distribution of benefit amongst others. The Nigerian Troops of 6 Division carried out operations against illegal artisan refineries. Over 160 illegal refining sites, 70 boats, 22 suspects, 27 stolen pipes and over 170 stolen products were confiscated. Troops also deactivated illegal connection points. Decades of aggression displayed has significantly resulted to environmental hazards and Niger Delta been one of the world's most polluted places. Life expectancy is now just 41. There have been thousands of oil spills since Shell began activity in



1958 — 822 in 2020-2021, poisoning fishing and drinking water.

Relative Deprivation Theory, initially propounded by Samuel Stouffer and colleagues in 1949, offers a compelling framework for understanding how individuals or groups assess their well-being by comparing themselves to others. When a significant gap is perceived between their circumstances and those of others, particularly in wealth, status, or opportunities, feelings of deprivation may arise. This sense of relative deprivation can lead to frustration, resentment, and anger, which may subsequently drive collective actions or criminal behavior aimed at redressing the perceived injustices.

The adoption of Relative Deprivation Theory is also justified in the context of the Niger Delta due to its relevance in explaining the underlying social and psychological dynamics that fuel oil theft in the region. Despite being one of the wealthiest areas in Nigeria due to oil resources, the Niger Delta remains plagued by poverty and a lack of essential infrastructure such as roads, schools, and healthcare facilities. The disparity between the region's oil-generated wealth and the local residents' economic conditions creates a profound sense of relative deprivation. Communities often compare their standards of living not only with wealthier Nigerians but also with the profits derived from their region's resources, leading to feelings of disenfranchisement and perceived injustice. The theory effectively captures how these comparisons can incite local resentment toward the government and oil companies, perceived as benefiting disproportionately while failing to invest adequately in local development.

The choice of this theory is further justified as it elucidates the social dynamics within communities. When individuals feel deprived, they often turn to their peers for validation and support, which can contribute to the normalization of criminal behaviors such as oil theft. The widespread acceptance of oil theft in some communities within the Niger Delta as a legitimate reaction to deprivation and marginalization is a critical social dynamic that

Relative Deprivation Theory helps to explain. By addressing how feelings of deprivation lead to a collective response, the theory provides insights into the persistence of oil theft and the broader culture of resistance against perceived exploitation.

Ultimately, adopting Relative Deprivation Theory allows policymakers and researchers to better understand the motivations behind oil theft in the Niger Delta. It emphasizes the need to address the root causes, such as inequitable resource distribution and infrastructural neglect, rather than focusing solely on punitive measures. This theoretical approach supports strategies that prioritize fair resource allocation, infrastructure development, and community involvement to alleviate relative deprivation and foster a more secure and sustainable environment in the Niger Delta.

#### **Methodology:**

This study investigated the intricate relationship between infrastructural development, security, and the prevention of oil theft in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, employing a descriptive and expository research design. The descriptive design provided a comprehensive overview of existing conditions related to infrastructural development, security measures, and oil theft, allowing for the identification of patterns and relationships. Simultaneously, the expository design explored the underlying factors contributing to the prevalence of oil theft, facilitating a deeper understanding of how infrastructural inadequacies and security challenges related to this issue.

Data for the study were drawn from secondary sources, including textbooks that offered theoretical frameworks, academic journals presenting peer-reviewed research findings, government bulletins providing statistics and insights into policies, and reports from non-governmental organizations focusing on development and security issues in the Niger Delta. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, aided by a thematic method. This process began with the systematic review and collation of

relevant texts, reports, and documents to identify key themes and patterns associated with infrastructural development, security, and oil theft. Key concepts were extracted and organized into categories through coding, facilitating the identification of recurring ideas pertinent to the study. Thematic analysis followed, enabling an exploration of the implications of these themes for infrastructural development, security, and oil theft prevention, while elucidating the relationships among them and their impact on the Niger Delta.

### **Discussion of Findings:**

The infrastructural deficiencies in host communities such as Ogoni and Gbaramatu in the Niger Delta illustrate the significant socio-economic challenges the region faces. In Ogoni, despite being close to oil production facilities and experiencing decades of oil extraction, the community's infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Poor road conditions, particularly between Bodo and Bonny, complicate transportation, especially during the rainy season. This infrastructural challenge raises logistics costs, hinders the movement of goods and people, and limits access to essential services like healthcare and education. As a result, residents experience frequent disruptions in school attendance and struggle to obtain medical care, which negatively impacts the community's quality of life (UNEP, 2011).

Similarly, Gbaramatu Kingdom suffers from inadequate infrastructure, including unreliable electricity supply, which significantly hampers economic activities. The lack of consistent power forces residents to depend on expensive and polluting generators, raising business operation costs and limiting the potential for economic diversification. This electricity shortfall also discourages industrial growth beyond oil-related activities. Additionally, healthcare infrastructure in Gbaramatu is inadequate, with few functional health facilities and a shortage of qualified medical personnel, leading to high maternal and child mortality rates. The community's educational facilities are similarly deficient, lacking basic amenities like functional classrooms

and laboratories, which results in poor educational outcomes compared to more developed regions (Aigbiremolen et al., 2018; Nwajiuba, 2020).

These cases demonstrate that infrastructural deficiencies not only contribute to poverty but also sustain a cycle of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta. Poor infrastructure deters investments, increases business costs, and perpetuates economic stagnation and high unemployment. Addressing these challenges by improving transportation, electricity, healthcare, and education infrastructure is crucial for unlocking the region's economic potential and fostering sustainable development (Abang&Usang, 2019).

### **Conclusion:**

The relationship between infrastructural development, security, and the prevention of oil theft in the Niger Delta is a complex and multifaceted issue that demands a coordinated approach from the government, local communities, and various stakeholders. The prevalence of oil theft in the region poses significant economic, environmental, and social challenges, undermining Nigeria's economic stability and development. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive strategy that not only tackles security concerns but also involves significant investments in infrastructure to foster sustainable growth and reduce the appeal of criminal activities.

Infrastructural deficiencies in the Niger Delta, such as poor road networks, lack of electricity, inadequate health facilities, and insufficient educational institutions, contribute to a sense of neglect among local communities. This neglect often breeds discontent, making some community members more susceptible to participating in illegal activities like oil theft as a means of survival. Therefore, improving infrastructure in the region is a critical step toward alleviating poverty and creating legitimate economic opportunities, thereby discouraging involvement in oil theft.

Enhancing security measures is equally important for deterring oil theft. The deployment of advanced surveillance technologies, better-equipped law enforcement, and increased presence of security forces can help protect oil infrastructure and deter criminal activities. However, security efforts must be coupled with community engagement to be truly effective. Local communities should be actively involved in security initiatives, as their cooperation is essential for gathering intelligence and preventing sabotage of oil facilities. When residents are integrated into the security framework, they become stakeholders in the region's stability, which further discourages participation in illegal activities.

This paper call on all critical stakeholders from the government to the cooperate private sector to ensure that oil and gas companies protect the local communities and the environment. The environmental degradation often results to economic frustration of all dimensions resulting to aggression, agitation and threat to security. This paper proposes that Responsible political leadership and representation is at the core of all solution to the challenges face in the Niger Delta.

### Recommendations:

- i. **Responsible & Visionary Political Leadership:** The current trend and trajectory of infrastructure development deficit and threat to regional security can be turned around good through genuine, responsible, and visionary political leadership in the pursuit of the region's interest. We must enthrone leaders that will scale over the resource curse paradigm.
- ii. **Structural Integrity of Oil Pipeline and Asset:** Materiality, design code, as well as technology are major determinants that ensure the structural integrity of oil and gas pipelines.
- iii. **Integrated Infrastructural Development:** To effectively tackle oil theft in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government should adopt a multi-faceted

infrastructural development strategy. This approach should prioritize upgrading road networks, implementing modern surveillance systems, and investing in the capacity building of local communities. Providing basic amenities like schools, hospitals, and clean water is crucial, as it can reduce the allure of illegal activities by creating alternative avenues for economic empowerment. Infrastructural improvements should be targeted toward areas most affected by oil theft to facilitate better access for security personnel and enable economic diversification.

- iv. **Enhancing Security Frameworks:** The security framework in the Niger Delta should be reinforced by prioritizing community involvement and intelligence gathering. Establishing community policing initiatives, where local residents collaborate with law enforcement agencies, can enhance security, deter theft, and improve relations between the community and authorities. To strengthen monitoring capabilities, adopting advanced technologies like drones and satellite surveillance should be pursued to detect illegal activities along pipeline routes swiftly.
- v. **Investment in Infrastructure:** The government should allocate sufficient resources to infrastructural development in the Niger Delta to stimulate economic activities, improve living conditions, and increase access to essential services. Enhanced infrastructure will not only support economic growth but also aid in the swift deployment of security forces.
- vi. **Legislation and Enforcement:** There is a need for more stringent laws against oil theft, coupled with rigorous enforcement to deter offenders. This includes imposing severe penalties for oil theft and vandalism while ensuring the legal system is equipped to handle such cases promptly. Additionally, implementing

policies that incentivize lawful economic activities can draw individuals away from criminal enterprises.

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