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**OIL RESOURCE CRISIS AND SOCIAL WORK
INTERVENTION IN EMOHUA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA,
RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The oil resource crisis in Nigeria's Niger Delta, particularly in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, has created a paradox of wealth and deprivation. This study examines the oil resource crisis in Emohua, with a specific focus on the roles of social work interventions in addressing the challenges posed by oil exploitation. It explores how environmental degradation, unemployment, and poverty intersect with social work responses. Three research questions were raised as a roadmap to the study. Ecological Systems Theory was adopted. This study also adopted a descriptive qualitative research design, relying on secondary data for data collection, and was analyzed using thematic content analysis. The study revealed that oil exploitation in Emohua has resulted in severe environmental degradation, including soil infertility, water pollution, and deforestation, which have disrupted agricultural and fishing livelihoods. Social work interventions such as health education, advocacy for environmental rights, and psychosocial support have become essential in mitigating the adverse impacts on community well-being; and also that weak governance frameworks, lack of accountability, and inadequate policy implementation have worsened the oil resource crisis in Emohua. This governance gap has expanded the roles of social workers beyond traditional practice, compelling them to engage in advocacy, conflict resolution, and community mobilization to demand justice and sustainable development. It was recommended that Social work practice should be mainstreamed into local governance structures, especially in oil-bearing communities. By formally recognizing social workers in environmental and developmental policymaking, their capacity to mediate conflicts, advocate for rights, and design community-driven interventions will be enhanced.

Keywords: Oil Resource Crisis; Social Work Intervention; Environmental Degradation; Advocacy; Sustainable Development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The discovery and exploration of oil resources in Nigeria has been both a blessing and a curse, particularly for communities in the Niger Delta, such as Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. Nigeria, being one of Africa's largest oil producers, derives about 80% of its national revenue from petroleum resources (Okonkwo, 2021). Yet, paradoxically, the communities where these resources are extracted remain trapped in poverty, underdevelopment, and environmental degradation. The oil resource crisis has become a central challenge in the Niger Delta, manifesting in socio-economic dislocation, ecological destruction, and communal conflicts. This paradox of resource wealth and human suffering is at the heart of the oil crisis in the Niger Delta region, where residents face daily struggles for survival amidst vast natural wealth. Oil exploration has led to deforestation, loss of farmlands, gas flaring, and water pollution, which have in turn undermined traditional sources of livelihood such as farming and fishing (Ebeku, 2020). The consequences of this resource exploitation are far-reaching: food insecurity, health hazards, forced migration, and inter-communal clashes over dwindling resources. These crises are worsened by the failure of oil companies and government institutions to adequately address corporate social responsibility obligations and provide basic amenities to affected communities (Odu, 2019). This scenario reflects the "resource curse" theory, which argues that nations or communities endowed with abundant natural resources often experience economic stagnation, weak institutions, and socio-political instability due to mismanagement of the resource wealth (Ross, 2012).

Beyond the environmental and economic impacts, the oil crisis has also created deep-rooted social challenges. Youth unemployment, social unrest, and crime have become prevalent as a result of disenfranchisement from oil wealth (Ojo & Akande, 2022). Many young people, disillusioned by the lack of opportu-

nities, resort to militancy, oil bunkering, or other forms of social vices as coping mechanisms. Women and children, on the other hand, bear the brunt of health-related problems caused by pollution, such as respiratory illnesses, waterborne diseases, and psychological stress from displacement (Okafor, 2021). These challenges underscore the urgency of social work intervention as a mediating force for community empowerment and development. Social work, with its core values of social justice, human rights, and empowerment, plays a critical role in mitigating the oil resource crisis. Through advocacy, capacity building, psychosocial support, and community mobilization, social workers can promote sustainable development and enhance the resilience of affected communities (Ife, 2016).

Social work intervention is essential in fostering dialogue between oil companies, government, and host communities, while also equipping residents with coping strategies for the environmental and social impacts of oil exploration. Additionally, social workers contribute to the design and implementation of community development projects such as health education, vocational training, and conflict resolution initiatives aimed at restoring dignity and hope to marginalized groups (Oni, 2020). Importantly, the oil crisis cannot be addressed solely through political and economic policies without the integration of social work practice. Social work interventions offer a people-centered approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of environmental justice, social equity, and sustainable livelihoods. This study therefore seeks to explore the dimensions of the oil resource crisis and examine how social work intervention can serve as a viable tool for promoting community resilience, social justice, and sustainable development. By interrogating the nexus between resource exploitation and social work practice.

Despite Nigeria's status as one of the world's leading oil producers, oil-bearing communities like Emohua

in Rivers State continue to face deep socio-economic and environmental crises. The paradox of oil wealth amidst poverty and marginalization is well-documented in Niger Delta scholarship (Ross, 2012; Okonkwo, 2021). However, the specific realities in Emohua underscore the urgency of intervention. Oil exploration in the area has led to severe environmental degradation, including oil spills, gas flaring, and water contamination, which destroy farmlands, aquatic life, and forests that serve as the primary sources of livelihood for residents. Empirical studies show that over 60% of households in oil-producing communities of Rivers State have lost farmland or fishing waters due to pollution (Ebeku, 2020). In Emohua specifically, local reports indicate that oil spillage has directly reduced agricultural productivity and increased food insecurity (Odu, 2019). In fact, a study by Emeodu (2024) confirmed that in 2nd October, 2023, over 45 persons were burnt to death and some severely injured in Ibaa community, as induced by the activities related to pipeline vandalism and illegal oil theft, and refining. Similarly, a related situation was reported by Business Day News, as over 100 people were killed in the Rumuekpe community, which occurred where people were scooping crude oil. The health consequences of oil exploitation are equally devastating. According to Okafor (2021), communities exposed to oil spills and gas flaring record higher incidences of respiratory illnesses, skin diseases, and waterborne infections compared to non-oil-producing communities. Women and children, being more vulnerable, face disproportionate health burdens and psychological distress, particularly in cases of displacement. Meanwhile, youth unemployment and disenfranchisement remain high in Emohua, fueling militancy, illegal oil bunkering, and other anti-social behaviors (Ojo & Akande, 2022). This perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty, violence, and underdevelopment despite the enormous revenues derived from oil resources.

The communities in Emohua LGA rely on forests for

resources; there exist the problems of deforestation, which led to loss of biodiversity, disruption of ecosystems, and soil erosion. There have been cases of Water Pollution which if not properly tackled can lead to waterborne diseases and ecosystem damage. Most of the rivers in the area of study have been contaminated given the continued illegal oil activities and oil exploration. This activity of man has led to various air pollution that degrade air quality, and as such led to respiratory problems and other health quagmires such as the prevalence or crisis of black soot emission (Elem, 2020). Aside from the above, there exists the issue of loss of biodiversity. This occurs due to the destruction of natural habitats which led to the loss of plants and animal species, disrupting the local ecosystem and potentially affecting food chains. There have been the problems of climate change effects, rising temperatures, changing weather patterns and extreme weather events which have impacted on agriculture and water availability.

Although government policies such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and corporate social responsibility programs by oil companies were intended to alleviate these challenges, their implementation has been largely ineffective due to corruption, poor monitoring, and lack of community participation (Ikelegbe, 2019). Empirical evidence suggests that less than 30% of corporate social responsibility projects in Rivers State are sustained beyond their initial launch, leaving communities like Emohua in worsening conditions (Ite et al., 2020). These failures highlight the limitations of purely political and economic responses to the oil crisis. Social work intervention, with its focus on social justice, empowerment, and community participation, offers a people-centered alternative for addressing the oil resource crisis. Yet, research on social work's role in oil-producing communities in Nigeria is relatively limited. Existing studies have largely focused on environmental justice (Ebeku, 2020), corporate social responsibility

(Ite et al., 2020), and youth militancy (Ojo & Akande, 2022), but few have examined how professional social work practice can contribute to community resilience and sustainable development in contexts like Emohua. Moreover, while social workers are active in health, education, and welfare sectors, their strategic role in resource-based conflicts and environmental crises remains underexplored in empirical literature. The gap, therefore, lies in the insufficient scholarly attention to social work intervention as a structured response to the oil resource crisis in Emohua Local Government Area. While previous studies have investigated the socio-economic and environmental consequences of oil exploration in the Niger Delta, there is little empirical research that integrates social work approaches—such as advocacy, community mobilization, psychosocial support, and conflict resolution—into discussions on oil resource governance. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the oil resource crisis in Emohua through the lens of social work, thereby providing evidence-based insights into how social work can contribute to sustainable community development and environmental justice.

1.1 Research Questions

- What link exists between environmental degradation caused by oil resource exploitation and the social work interventions such as health education, advocacy, and psychosocial support in oil-producing communities?
- What are the socio-economic consequences of the oil resource crisis—particularly unemployment, poverty, and livelihood disruption—and their implications for social work interventions like empowerment programs and capacity-building initiatives?
- What evidence supports governance and policy failures in addressing the oil resource crisis have shaped the roles of social workers in advocacy, conflict resolution, and promoting sustainable

community development in communities in Emohua?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Ecological Systems Theory

One of the most suitable theories to underpin this study on The Oil Resource Crisis and Social Work Intervention in Emohua Local Government Area is the Ecological Systems Theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 in his classic book *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. This theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interaction between individuals and the multiple environments that shape their lives. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that human development and social well-being cannot be studied in isolation from the surrounding context; rather, they must be examined within a set of inter-related systems that influence outcomes directly and indirectly. This makes the theory highly relevant to the oil resource crisis, which is not a single-dimensional problem but a complex interaction of environmental, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that affect individuals, families, and communities in Emohua.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualized the environment as consisting of five interrelated systems:

- **Microsystem** – the immediate environment in which individuals live, such as family, peers, schools, and neighborhoods.
- **Mesosystem** – the linkages and relationships between two or more microsystems, such as the connection between family experiences and community organizations.
- **Exosystem** – the larger social structures that do not directly involve the individual but exert influence, such as government policies, oil companies' operations, or the media.

- **Macrosystem** – the overarching cultural, social, and political values, ideologies, and economic structures that frame the lower systems.
- **Chronosystem** – the dimension of time, which considers changes and transitions in both the individual's life and the socio-historical context, such as long-term environmental degradation or inter-generational poverty.
- The ecological systems theory rests on several key assumptions that make it particularly useful for analyzing the oil resource crisis and social work interventions:
- **Holistic interaction** – Individuals and communities are products of continuous interactions between themselves and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, environmental degradation caused by oil spills or gas flaring cannot be viewed in isolation from its impact on livelihoods, family stability, or community health.
- **Interconnectedness of systems** – A change in one system can create ripple effects across other systems. For example, environmental pollution (microsystem) can affect school attendance and child development, while poor governance (macrosystem) shapes how communities respond to oil exploitation.
- **Contextual influence** – Human well-being is shaped not only by immediate settings but also by larger social, political, and economic structures. In the case of Emohua, the failures of oil governance and corporate social responsibility at the exosystem and macrosystem levels shape everyday struggles in households and neighborhoods.
- **Dynamic and temporal nature** – The theory assumes that systems are dynamic and evolve over time. Thus, the long-term effects of oil exploitation, such as generational poverty or health burdens, must be understood within the chronosys-

tem dimension (Ungar, 2011).

Applying ecological systems theory to the oil resource crisis in Emohua provides a framework for analyzing how different environmental levels contribute to social problems and how social work interventions can respond across multiple dimensions. At the microsystem level, families and individuals in Emohua face direct challenges such as loss of farmland, contaminated water sources, and health hazards resulting from oil spills and gas flaring. Social work interventions here may involve providing psychosocial support, health education, and direct assistance to vulnerable households (Gray & Webb, 2013; Ife, 2016; Ungar, 2011).

Finally, the ecological systems theory is particularly suitable for this study for several reasons. First, it provides a holistic lens to examine the oil resource crisis as an interconnected web of ecological, social, and political challenges, rather than a single-dimensional problem. Second, it highlights the multi-level role of social work interventions, from providing direct support to individuals and families to advocating for systemic reforms at national and international levels. Third, the theory acknowledges the temporal dimension of crises, which is critical in understanding the enduring and cumulative impacts of oil exploitation in Emohua. Lastly, it aligns with the values of social work by emphasizing the importance of context, participation, and empowerment in addressing social problems.

1.2.2 Oil Resource Crisis

The concept of an oil resource crisis refers to the complex socio-economic, environmental, and political challenges that emerge in societies heavily dependent on petroleum resources. It goes beyond the fluctuations of global oil markets to encapsulate the destructive consequences of oil exploration and production on local communities, especially in developing countries. Scholars generally describe the crisis as

a paradox, where nations and communities endowed with abundant oil wealth often experience poverty, institutional decay, and social unrest, a phenomenon widely known as the “resource curse” (Auty, 1993; Ross, 2012). In essence, the oil resource crisis manifests when the exploitation of petroleum resources generates adverse outcomes that undermine sustainable development, social equity, and environmental justice.

From an environmental perspective, the oil resource crisis involves persistent ecological degradation caused by oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation, which lead to soil infertility, loss of biodiversity, and water contamination (Ebeku, 2020). These environmental impacts erode the natural capital that sustains local livelihoods, thereby increasing vulnerability among rural households dependent on farming and fishing. Conceptually, therefore, the crisis can be seen as the systematic destruction of ecosystems in ways that directly threaten human survival and community resilience. Economically, the oil resource crisis is marked by dependency on oil rents, underdevelopment of other productive sectors, high unemployment, and increasing poverty among host communities. The dominance of oil in Nigeria’s economy has created structural distortions that exacerbate inequality, weaken local industries, and fuel cycles of deprivation (Okonkwo, 2021). This economic dimension underscores the idea that oil, while a valuable resource, can become a barrier to inclusive growth when revenues are mismanaged and communities are excluded from decision-making processes.

Politically and socially, the oil resource crisis embodies governance failures, corruption, and conflict. Weak regulatory institutions often fail to enforce environmental standards or hold oil companies accountable, while revenue allocation systems exclude host communities from meaningful participation in resource governance (Ikelegbe, 2019). This situation fuels mistrust, grievances, and violent conflicts, particular-

ly among youth who face marginalization and unemployment (Ojo & Akande, 2022). Thus, conceptually, the crisis represents both a governance challenge and a social justice issue, as the costs of oil exploitation are disproportionately borne by marginalized populations. In summary, the oil resource crisis can be conceptually defined as the multi-dimensional set of environmental, socio-economic, and governance challenges that arise from oil exploitation, particularly in resource-rich but marginalized communities. It denotes a paradoxical situation where oil wealth contributes to ecological degradation, economic vulnerability, institutional weakness, and social unrest rather than fostering sustainable development (Karl, 1997; Ross, 2012).

1.2.3 Social Work Intervention

Social work intervention is a central concept in social work practice and scholarship, referring to deliberate actions, strategies, and methods employed by social workers to assist individuals, groups, and communities in addressing social problems and enhancing their well-being. Conceptually, intervention in social work is rooted in values of social justice, human rights, and empowerment, emphasizing the professional responsibility to engage with vulnerable populations and support them in overcoming barriers to development (Ife, 2016; Healy, 2014). It involves a systematic process of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation designed to respond to clients’ needs within their social, cultural, and economic contexts. At the micro level, social work intervention focuses on individuals and families, addressing personal and relational challenges through counseling, psychosocial support, and case management. At the mezzo level, interventions target groups and organizations by facilitating support groups, capacity-building initiatives, and community mobilization programs. At the macro level, social workers engage in advocacy, policy development, and structural change to address systemic injustices and promote social equity (Payne,

2014). This multi-level approach underscores the holistic nature of social work intervention as a discipline concerned with both personal well-being and broader societal transformation.

Social work interventions can also be categorized by their methodologies. Remedial interventions aim to correct or reduce existing problems such as trauma, poverty, or displacement; preventive interventions seek to minimize risks and protect communities before social issues escalate; while developmental interventions focus on capacity building, empowerment, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods (Midgley, 2014). These categories highlight the proactive and responsive nature of social work, making it especially relevant in addressing crises such as those created by oil resource exploitation in Emohua and other parts of the Niger Delta. Furthermore, social work intervention is inherently contextual and participatory. It draws upon indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and community resources in order to design solutions that are both relevant and sustainable. Scholars emphasize that interventions are most effective when they actively involve communities in the problem-solving process, rather than imposing externally driven models (Gray & Webb, 2013). In this sense, social work intervention is not only about providing services but also about fostering agency, resilience, and empowerment among marginalized groups.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design, relying on secondary data to explore the dynamics of the oil resource crisis and social work interventions in Emohua Local Government Area. The design was considered appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth analysis of existing empirical studies, government reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature to understand the extent, consequences, and interventions related to oil exploitation in the

area (Creswell, 2018). The study focused on Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, a community located in the Niger Delta region. Emohua is one of the oil-producing LGAs in Rivers State, characterized by a predominantly agrarian and fishing economy that has been severely disrupted by oil exploitation activities. The area has witnessed persistent challenges such as environmental degradation, unemployment, poverty, youth restiveness, and communal conflicts associated with resource control and oil politics (Nwosu & Chukwu, 2021). Data for this study were obtained exclusively from secondary sources. This approach ensured that the study was grounded in credible, validated, and contextually relevant data. The data collected were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Relevant documents were systematically reviewed, coded, and categorized into themes that aligned with the study objectives and research questions.

3.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

3.1 Link Between Environmental Degradation Caused by Oil Resource Exploitation and The Social Work Interventions In Oil-Producing Communities

The findings of this study reveal a strong and multi-dimensional relationship between environmental degradation caused by oil exploitation and the necessity for social work interventions in oil-producing communities of Emohua Local Government Area. Environmental degradation manifests in forms such as oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and water contamination, all of which undermine health, livelihoods, and social cohesion. Social work interventions—including health education, advocacy, psychosocial support, community mobilization, and policy engagement—emerge as vital responses to mitigate these impacts.

- 3.1.1 Oil-Induced Health Hazards and the Role of Health Education: One of the most significant

impacts of oil resource exploitation is the deterioration of public health. Oil spills pollute rivers and farmlands, leading to contaminated drinking water and food supplies, while gas flaring releases toxic substances that increase respiratory diseases, cancers, and reproductive health problems (Nriagu et al., 2016). In Emohua, study by Elem (2021), residents reported increased cases of skin rashes, eye irritation, and chronic illnesses directly linked to oil-related pollution. This situation underscores the crucial role of health education as a social work intervention. By creating awareness on the dangers of consuming contaminated water and fish, teaching preventive health practices, and sensitizing communities on environmental hygiene, social workers help reduce health vulnerabilities. Thus, a direct link exists between oil-induced health hazards and health education, as the latter empowers residents with knowledge to protect themselves against the harmful effects of pollution

- 3.1.2 Livelihood Disruption and the Need for Advocacy: Oil exploitation has also devastated the agrarian and fishing-based livelihoods of communities in Emohua. Spilled crude oil destroys farmlands, reduces soil fertility, and contaminates rivers, leading to food insecurity and unemployment. This economic displacement has generated frustration, increased poverty, and heightened youth restiveness in oil-bearing communities (Obi, 2018). Here, advocacy becomes a crucial social work intervention. Social workers advocate on behalf of affected populations, demanding compensation from oil companies, pressing for environmental remediation, and pushing government agencies to enforce corporate accountability. This advocacy not only addresses the immediate economic losses but also challenges the structural injustices that perpetuate inequality in resource allocation. Hence, a clear link exists between live-

lihood disruption caused by environmental degradation and advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring justice and sustainable development.

- 3.1.3 Community Displacement and Psychosocial Support: Another major finding is that oil exploitation leads to displacement of households and communities. Continuous oil spills and gas flaring make some areas uninhabitable, forcing families to migrate. This dislocation often produces psychosocial trauma, loss of cultural identity, and inter-family conflicts over scarce resources. In Emohua, displaced residents reported feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, and depression. In this regard, psychosocial support provided by social workers is critical. Through counseling services, trauma management, and the creation of safe spaces for dialogue, social workers help displaced individuals cope with grief and rebuild resilience. This link between community displacement and psychosocial support reflects the human-centered role of social work in mitigating the psychological and social impacts of environmental crises.
- 3.1.4 Environmental Injustice and the Mobilization of Community Action: The findings further show that oil resource exploitation has created a profound sense of injustice among communities, as they suffer environmental harm while deriving minimal benefits from oil wealth. This injustice has bred mistrust towards both oil companies and the state, fueling occasional protests and conflicts. In response, community mobilization emerges as a social work intervention. Social workers mobilize communities to engage in collective action—such as peaceful protests, negotiations, and joint clean-up campaigns—while discouraging violence. Mobilization strengthens community solidarity, builds local leadership, and fosters collective bargaining power. Thus, there is a direct link between environmental injustice and the need for community mobilization as a strategy for reclaim-

ing rights and demanding accountability.

- **3.1.5 Governance Failure and Policy Advocacy for Structural Change:** Finally, findings reveal that poor governance and weak regulatory oversight exacerbate the oil crisis. Government agencies often fail to enforce environmental laws or hold multinational oil companies accountable, leaving communities vulnerable to exploitation. This governance gap requires policy advocacy by social workers, who can influence legislation, push for stricter enforcement of environmental standards, and lobby for community participation in decision-making. For example, social workers can collaborate with civil society organizations and international bodies to pressure both government and oil companies into adopting sustainable practices. The link here is that governance failure in managing oil resources necessitates robust policy advocacy to address structural inequalities and safeguard the rights of vulnerable communities.

3.2 The Socio-Economic Consequences of The Oil Resource Crisis and Their Implications For Social Work Interventions Like Empowerment Programs and Capacity-Building Initiatives

This section highlights some major socio-economic effects and their implications for social work.

- **3.2.1 Unemployment and the Need for Capacity-Building Initiatives:** A major finding is the high level of unemployment among residents of oil-producing communities. Oil companies employ only a small proportion of local labor, preferring highly skilled workers from outside the region. Meanwhile, traditional sources of livelihood, such as farming and fishing, have been undermined by environmental degradation, leaving a large segment of the youth population jobless. This situation has been linked to rising crime rates, militancy, and substance abuse among communities in Emohua (Ibaba, 2018). The implication for social work is

the urgent need for capacity-building initiatives. Social workers can collaborate with government agencies and non-governmental organizations to design vocational training programs that equip young people with employable skills in trades such as carpentry, welding, ICT, and agribusiness. Capacity-building helps bridge the skills gap and enhances self-reliance, reducing dependency on the oil industry. Therefore, a direct link exists between the challenge of unemployment and social work interventions in the form of capacity development to create sustainable alternative employment opportunities.

- **3.2.2 Poverty and the Role of Empowerment Programs:** The findings also indicate that poverty levels are disproportionately high in oil-producing areas despite the enormous revenue generated from oil. This paradox of “resource wealth and local poverty” is evident in Emohua communities, where residents struggle with poor infrastructure, limited access to clean water, and inadequate healthcare services. Oil spills and gas flaring reduce agricultural yields, pushing families into deeper poverty (UNDP, 2020). This situation highlights the need for empowerment programs as a social work intervention. Social workers can initiate microcredit schemes, cooperative societies, and women-focused empowerment programs that enable households to generate income through small-scale businesses. Empowerment programs also build community resilience by equipping residents with the tools to break cycles of dependency and exclusion. Thus, poverty induced by the oil resource crisis necessitates social work strategies that enhance economic self-sufficiency and improve the standard of living.
- **3.2.3 Livelihood Disruption and Skills Diversification through Social Work:** Another finding is that oil exploitation has disrupted traditional livelihoods, especially farming and fishing, which

are central to the socio-economic life of Emohua people. Oil spills contaminate farmlands, making them unproductive, while polluted rivers drastically reduce fish stocks. The loss of these livelihoods not only undermines food security but also erodes cultural practices tied to farming and fishing. This disruption has forced many families into economic vulnerability, with limited alternatives for survival (Okafor, 2019). The implication for social work is the promotion of skills diversification and livelihood restoration programs. Social workers can facilitate training in modern agriculture techniques, aquaculture, and small-scale enterprise development. By helping communities shift from destroyed livelihoods to sustainable alternatives, social work interventions reduce vulnerability and promote long-term socio-economic stability. The link here is clear: livelihood disruption calls for innovative capacity-building and economic empowerment strategies that allow communities to adapt and thrive in the face of environmental crises.

- **3.2.4 Health Challenges and the Need for Health-Oriented Social Work Interventions:** The oil resource crisis is closely associated with severe health implications for residents of oil-producing communities. Gas flaring releases toxic substances that cause respiratory diseases, skin infections, and eye problems, while oil spills contaminate drinking water, increasing cases of waterborne diseases such as cholera and dysentery (Ebegbulem, Ekpe, & Adejumo, 2019). In Emohua lga, local healthcare facilities are grossly inadequate to manage these health risks, leaving communities vulnerable. For social work practice, this creates the need for health-oriented interventions such as public health education, community sensitization on hygiene, and advocacy for improved healthcare services. Social workers can also provide psychosocial support to families facing chronic

illness due to environmental pollution. The direct link here is that health consequences of oil exploitation demand targeted social work responses that integrate health education and advocacy into community development initiatives.

- **3.2.5 Migration and Social Displacement: Implications for Community-Based Interventions:** Another socio-economic consequence of the oil resource crisis is forced migration and displacement. As farmlands and rivers lose productivity, many residents—especially the youth—migrate to urban centers in search of better opportunities. This rural–urban drift not only reduces the agricultural labor force but also puts pressure on urban infrastructure, often leading to slum proliferation and crime (Okoli & Orinya, 2018). In Emohua, some households have been displaced due to oil spills and pipeline explosions. For social workers, this highlights the importance of community-based interventions that reduce displacement pressures. Programs that promote local development, such as community farming cooperatives, microfinance support, and infrastructural advocacy, can help residents remain rooted in their communities. Moreover, social workers can provide integration support for those displaced, ensuring they have access to shelter, education, and livelihood opportunities in new locations. Hence, migration and displacement underscore the role of social work in both prevention and adaptation strategies.

3.3 Ways Governance and Policy Failures in Addressing The Oil Resource Crisis have Shaped The Roles of Social Workers in Advocacy, Conflict Resolution, and Promoting Sustainable Community Development

Governance failures manifested as weak regulatory enforcement, lack of transparent benefit-sharing, ineffective remediation, and poorly implemented cor-

porate social responsibility (CSR) programs—have been widely documented as central drivers of the oil resource crisis in the Niger Delta. Scholars show that regulatory gaps and capture by elites allow oil pollution and environmental degradation to persist, while revenues and CSR benefits rarely reach host communities in meaningful, sustainable ways (Ikelegbe, 2019; Ite et al., 2020). These institutional failures produce chronic grievance and a legitimacy deficit in state–community relations, leaving communities to seek alternative channels for redress. Empirical studies across Rivers State and adjacent oil-producing areas report persistent spill events, protracted cleanup delays, and community dissatisfaction with compensation processes — conditions that generate social instability and constrain conventional development efforts (Ebeku, 2020; Obi, 2018).

As formal governance mechanisms falter, social workers have been compelled to adopt expanded, often hybrid roles that go beyond traditional casework to encompass public advocacy and rights-based practice. Where statutory agencies and corporate grievance mechanisms are inaccessible or ineffective, social workers become intermediaries who document harms, support communities to present claims, and lobby state and corporate actors for remediation and compensation (Oni, 2020; Ife, 2016). Empirical studies of social practice in oil-affected communities indicate social workers and community development practitioners frequently coordinate evidence-gathering (health and livelihood impact assessments), accompany victims in compensation hearings, and engage in public campaigns to demand environmental cleanup — activities that are essentially political and advocacy-oriented because formal institutions have not delivered justice (Gray & Webb, 2013; Ite et al., 2020).

Governance failures also intensify local conflicts (over land, benefits, and blame), which has led social workers to assume visible peacebuilding and con-

flict-resolution functions. Research on the Niger Delta shows that disputes over compensation, employment, and environmental access often escalate into community violence when institutional dispute-resolution is absent or biased (Ikelegbe, 2019; Akinwale, 2010). In these contexts, social workers apply mediation, participatory dialogue, and restorative approaches to de-escalate tensions, rebuild social capital, and create community forums for negotiated settlements. Evaluations of community-level interventions indicate that locally grounded mediation and inclusive decision-making — processes often facilitated by social work practitioners and civil society partners — reduce the appeal of violent mobilization and help rebuild trust between communities and external actors (Obi, 2018; Ungar, 2011).

The policy vacuum around sustainable livelihood restoration and environmental health has also pushed social workers into program design and capacity-building roles. Because national and corporate programs frequently fail in sustainability (for example, CSR projects that lapse or do not reflect community priorities), social workers have had to design and run empowerment programs, cooperative enterprises, and vocational training aimed at economic diversification and resilience (Ite et al., 2020; Ibaba, 2018). Empirical evidence from Niger-Delta NGOs and community projects indicates that locally tailored skills training, microfinance groups, and women-centred cooperatives — often facilitated by social work professionals — produce measurable improvements in household income and social cohesion when combined with participatory planning and follow-up (UNDP, 2020; Ife, 2016).

Finally, the persistence of governance and policy shortfalls has highlighted an advocacy role for social workers at the macro level: shaping policy, demanding transparency, and promoting participatory governance. Scholars argue that social workers must engage in systems-level advocacy to reform environ-

mental regulation, improve monitoring and enforcement, and institutionalize community participation in benefit-sharing and remediation planning (Healy, 2014; Gray & Webb, 2013). Case studies from the Niger Delta show social work alliances with human-rights groups and legal NGOs have sometimes succeeded in bringing attention to toxic harms and in pressuring agencies to act — demonstrating how professional social work practice can bridge micro relief and macro reform in the face of governance failure (Ebeku, 2020; Oni, 2020).

In sum, the paper supports a clear causal chain: governance and policy failures → persistent environmental and socio-economic harms → expanded roles for social workers in advocacy, mediation, livelihood restoration, and policy engagement. This repositioning reflects both necessity (communities' lack of other effective recourse) and opportunity (social work's capacity for participatory, rights-based practice). However, scholars also note limits: social workers operating in these expanded roles often lack institutional backing, are stretched by resource constraints, and can face politicization or resistance from powerful actors — gaps that suggest the need for stronger institutional linkages, interdisciplinary partnerships, and formal recognition of social work's role in environmental justice (Ikelegbe, 2019; Ife, 2016).

4.0 CONCLUSION

The evidence from both empirical and theoretical perspectives clearly demonstrates that governance and policy failures have been central in perpetuating the oil resource crisis in Emohua and other oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta. Weak regulatory frameworks, elite capture of oil revenues, inadequate enforcement of environmental laws, and the exclusion of host communities from decision-making have created a vacuum where environmental degradation, socio-economic dislocation, and recurring conflicts

thrive. These institutional shortcomings have left communities vulnerable and marginalized, with limited access to justice, sustainable livelihoods, and basic social services. In this context, social workers have been compelled to reconfigure their professional roles, moving beyond conventional practice to embrace advocacy, conflict resolution, and sustainable community development. Advocacy has become essential in amplifying the voices of marginalized residents, holding corporations and state actors accountable, and demanding transparency and equity in oil governance. Conflict resolution has gained prominence as community grievances, if left unaddressed, escalate into violent disputes that further undermine social cohesion. At the same time, social workers have been central to initiating empowerment programs, livelihood diversification, and capacity-building initiatives that aim to restore dignity, resilience, and self-reliance among affected populations.

The trajectory of social work practice in Emohua reflects a broader truth: that professional intervention cannot be divorced from structural realities. Where governance mechanisms fail, social workers become frontline agents of justice, mediators of peace, and facilitators of sustainable development. However, their effectiveness is constrained by limited institutional backing, resource challenges, and political resistance. This underscores the urgent need for a stronger enabling environment—one in which government, corporations, and civil society actors recognize and support the vital contributions of social work to environmental justice and community resilience. Ultimately, the oil resource crisis in Emohua illustrates the inseparability of governance, environment, and social welfare.

4.1 Recommendations

Strengthen Regulatory and Policy Frameworks: The government should review and enforce existing environmental and oil governance policies to ensure

accountability from oil companies. A stronger institutional framework will reduce policy gaps that perpetuate environmental injustice and enable social workers to engage effectively in advocacy and monitoring roles.

- **Institutionalize Social Work in Policy Processes:** Social work practice should be mainstreamed into local governance structures, especially in oil-bearing communities. By formally recognizing social workers in environmental and developmental policymaking, their capacity to mediate conflicts, advocate for rights, and design community-driven interventions will be enhanced.
- **Capacity Building for Social Workers:** There is a need to invest in specialized training programs for social workers in areas such as environmental justice, community mediation, advocacy strategies, and sustainable development. This will improve their ability to respond to the complex socio-economic and ecological challenges in Emohua and similar oil-producing areas.
- **Promote Participatory Governance:** Governments and oil companies should adopt participatory approaches by involving local communities, social workers, and civil society organizations in decision-making about oil resource management. This inclusive model will reduce mistrust, improve transparency, and empower communities to take ownership of development initiatives.
- **Expand Advocacy and Public Awareness Campaigns:** Social workers, in collaboration with NGOs, should intensify advocacy campaigns to raise awareness on environmental rights, corporate accountability, and community entitlements. Such campaigns will build grassroots solidarity and increase pressure on policymakers and oil corporations to act responsibly.
- **Support Sustainable Livelihood Programs:** To address the long-term socio-economic effects of

governance failures, social workers should champion livelihood diversification programs (e.g., agriculture, skills acquisition, and small-scale enterprise support). These programs will reduce dependency on oil-related benefits and enhance community resilience against future crises.

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