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## The Unspoken Curse of the Niger Delta: Why Property Rights Are Destroying a Region

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### Abstract

*The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is rich in natural resources, but it has also been plagued by poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation. This paper explores the role of property rights in this so-called "unspoken curse." The lack of clear and enforceable property rights has led to conflict, a power imbalance, and destructive practices. This has created a cycle of poverty and conflict such as conflict over land ownership, conflict over resource extraction, and conflict between communities that has been difficult to break. The paper concluded that the lack of property rights has contributed to environmental conflict, as well as other forms of conflict, including violence and social unrest. Meanwhile, resolving these conflicts will require addressing the underlying issue of property rights, as well as other issues such as poverty and marginalization. The paper suggested among others that the government should ensure the creation of a system of land registration that recognizes both legal and customary claims, and establish a process for resolving conflicts as well as involving local communities in decision-making around oil production and environmental management in order to improve the region's development and sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Unspoken Curse, Property Rights, Niger Delta.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is one of the most important oil-producing regions in Africa. It is located in the South of Nigeria, between the Gulf of Guinea and the Benue River. It is a very diverse region, with over fifty ethnic groups and many different languages spoken. It has a rich cultural heritage, with traditional art forms such as music, dance, and sculpture. The region is also home to important natural resources, including oil and natural gas, as well as fertile agricultural land (World Bank, 2016). The Niger Delta is made up of nine states, each with its unique geography and culture. The states are Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, Rivers, and Abia. The region is home to several major cities, including Port Harcourt, Warri, Calabar, and Uyo. It is also home to several national parks, including the Cross River National Park and the Okomu National Park. The Niger Delta region is one of the most important oil-producing regions in Africa. It is home to several oil fields, including the Oloibiri Field Oilfield, Bonny Oil Field, Bille-1 (Krkama), Bille-2 (Awoba) Oil Fields, Delta Field (Niger Delta), Bacino del Delta del Niger, the Escravos Oil Field and many more.

The region's oil and gas reserves are estimated to be worth billions of dollars, and the oil industry is a major source of employment and income for the region. However, the oil industry has also caused significant environmental damage, including pollution of waterways and air, as well as habitat destruction. The Niger Delta is the home of the majority of Nigeria's oil and gas reserves, and the industry has been a major source of employment and government revenue for the region. World Bank further added that the oil and gas industry accounts for around 10% of GDP and over 80% of government revenues. In addition, the industry has attracted billions of dollars in foreign investment (International Monetary Fund, 2018). The agriculture sector is also an important part of the regional economy, and it plays a significant role in the lives of many people in the Niger Delta. The region is home to a large number of small-scale farmers and fishermen, who depend on the land and waters of the region for their livelihoods. While agriculture does not account for as large a share of GDP as oil and gas, it is still a vital part of the regional economy.

Furthermore, agriculture plays an important role in local food security and poverty reduction. The fishing industry is particularly important in the coastal areas of the Niger Delta, where it provides a vital source of income and employment for many people. Fishing also plays a role in the region's food security, as it provides a source of protein for local communities. In terms of manufacturing, the Niger Delta is home to several manufacturing facilities, including the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, the Aluminium Smelter Company of Nigeria, and the Ajaokuta Steel Mill. These facilities provide employment and contribute to the regional economy (Nigeria Investment Promotion Commission, 2018). Its oil and gas resources have been the source of great wealth for Nigeria, but also of great environmental destruction and conflict.

While the Niger Delta region contributes significantly to the Nigerian economy, it also faces several challenges related to property rights. These challenges include unclear and overlapping land rights, which can lead to disputes and violence, insufficient government regulation of the oil and gas industry, which can lead to environmental degradation and pollution, inadequate compensation for communities affected by oil and gas extraction and lack of community participation in decision-making around oil and gas projects. These issues often lead to conflict and can hamper the region's ability to benefit fully from its natural resources. The Niger Delta region is home to many different ethnic groups, each with their system of land tenure and land ownership. The Nigerian government has not been able to create a unified system of land rights, which has led to disputes and conflicts between

communities, and between communities and the oil and gas companies operating in the region (Chukwuma & Ume, 2012). In some cases, these disputes have led to violence. The region has a long history of conflict, both within and between communities, and with the government and oil companies. This conflict has taken many forms, from non-violent protests to armed insurgency (Ikelegbe, 2005; Offiong & Cocodia, 2011).

Indeed, conflict in the Niger Delta has taken many forms over the years. In the early 1960s, some communities in the region began protesting against oil companies for environmental damage and lack of economic development. These protests were mostly non-violent, but some people did resort to violence. In the 1990s, several groups in the region, including the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), began to organize protests against the government and oil companies. These protests were met with violent crackdowns by the Nigerian government. In the early 2000s, a new wave of violence erupted in the region, as groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) began to carry out attacks on oil facilities and kidnap oil workers (Chene & Umar, 2015). This violence intensified in the late 2000s, with the group becoming increasingly powerful and well-armed. In 2009, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in the region and deployed troops to the region. The violence continued, but by 2011, the government had reached a ceasefire agreement with MEND.

However, sporadic violence has continued, and tensions remain high in the region. One of the most severe impacts has been the environmental damage caused by oil production. Oil spills, gas flaring, and other forms of pollution have led to the contamination of air, water, and soil in the region. This has had serious health consequences for local communities, including high rates of respiratory disease, skin disease, and cancer. It has also damaged livelihoods, as fishing, farming, and other traditional activities have been disrupted or destroyed. Another major impact of the conflict has been the erosion of trust between the people of the Niger Delta and the government, as well as the oil companies (Babatunde, 2020). The government has been accused of failing to protect the rights of local communities and of allowing oil companies to operate with impunity. This has led to a sense of alienation and injustice among the people of the Niger Delta and has fueled the cycle of violence and conflict.

The lack of property rights is a major factor in the environmental conflict in the Niger Delta. Under Nigerian law, most land in the region is classified as "communal land," meaning that it is owned by the community, not by individuals (Ukhurebor et al., 2021). This makes it difficult for individuals to assert their rights over the land and has led to disputes over land use and access to resources. It has also made it difficult for communities to benefit from the oil industry, as they have no legal right to royalties or other forms of compensation. However, the lack of clear and enforceable property rights in the Niger Delta has led to a situation where there is no clear mechanism for resolving disputes over land use and access to resources.

This has created a situation where communities feel that their rights are not respected, and where they are not benefiting from the wealth generated by the oil industry (Anderson et al., 2006). This has led to increasing resentment and frustration, which has manifested in violence and other forms of conflict. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that the paper explores the unspoken curse of the Niger Delta: why property rights are destroying a Region. The paper will argue that the lack of property rights has contributed to environmental conflict, as well as other forms of conflict, including violence and social unrest. It will also argue that resolving these conflicts will require addressing the underlying issue of property rights, as well as other issues such as poverty and marginalization.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### A Brief Description of the Niger Delta Region

The Niger Delta region is located in the southern part of Nigeria, along the Atlantic coast. It covers an area of about 70,000 square kilometres and is made up of nine states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. The region is known for its abundant natural resources, including oil, natural gas, and fertile soil (Porteous, 2019). The region's diverse geography includes coastal plains, river deltas, swamps, mangroves, and rainforests. The region is home to several important rivers, including the Niger, Benue, and Cross Rivers. The region has a tropical climate, with an average temperature of around 26 degrees Celsius. The region is also home to many ethnic groups, including the Igbo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo. The people of the region rely on fishing, farming, and trading as their main sources of income (Alao & Aigbokhan, 2020).

In terms of social and economic characteristics, the region is one of the poorest in Nigeria. Poverty rates are high, and unemployment is also common. Many people in the region lack access to basic services, such as healthcare and education. The region is also facing some environmental challenges, such as deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution (Adenipekun & Adebo, 2018). These challenges have hurt the health and livelihoods of the people living in the region. So, the region faces several complex social, economic, and environmental challenges (Alao & Aigbokhan, 2020).

### Property Right

Property rights in the Niger Delta region. Property rights refer to the legal and customary systems that determine who can own, use, and access land and other natural resources. In the Niger Delta region, there is a complex mix of legal and customary systems, which has led to some conflicts over land and other resources (Adenipekun & Adebo, 2018). The legal system of property rights in the Niger Delta region is based on the Land Use Act of 1978, which is a federal law that regulates the ownership and use of land in Nigeria (Udoekem, 2013). The act establishes the concept of "state land," which is all land that is not already owned by an individual or a community. The act also creates a system of "statutory rights of occupancy," which are a form of leasehold title to state land that can be granted by the government to individuals or communities. For instance, The PIA is a federal law that was enacted in 2021 to govern the oil and gas industry in Nigeria. The PIA has many provisions that affect land ownership and use in the Niger Delta region.

The Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) is a law that has an impact on the legal system in the Niger Delta region. The PIA is a federal law that regulates the oil and gas industry, and it affects the way land is owned and used in the region. The PIA requires oil companies to obtain consent from local communities before starting new projects, and it also requires them to engage in social responsibility programs that benefit local communities. This means that the PIA is relevant to the legal system of the region, and it affects how land is owned and used. The Land Use Act also provides for "customary rights of occupancy," which are a form of ownership that is based on customary law. Customary law is the system of law that is based on the customs and traditions of the people of the Niger Delta (Emuedo & Abam, 2015). Customary law is not codified in any written form but is instead passed down orally through generations. Customary rights of occupancy are typically granted to communities, rather than individuals, and are held in perpetuity.

Under the Land Use Act, the ownership of land is split between the federal government, the state government, and the communities that live on the land. This has led to several conflicts,

as the different levels of government have different priorities and interests when it comes to land use (Carl LeVan & Olubowale, 2014). For example, the federal government may be interested in promoting economic development through large-scale projects, while the communities living on the land may be more interested in preserving their traditional way of life and the environment. The Land Use Act provides for both legal and customary rights of occupancy. The legal system is based on the principles of formal law, which is codified in written statutes and is enforced by the courts. The customary system, on the other hand, is based on the principles of customary law, which are not written down but are passed down orally. This means that the customary system is more flexible and can adapt to changing circumstances. However, it also means that the customary system can be subject to abuse, as there is no clear legal framework to protect individuals' rights.

Under the legal system, individuals or communities can apply for a certificate of occupancy from the state government, which grants them the right to occupy and use the land for a specific purpose. However, the state government can also revoke a certificate of occupancy, which can lead to conflict and uncertainty. Under the customary system, land is held in trust by the community's traditional ruler, or "Oyibo." The Oyibo is responsible for allocating land to members of the community and for resolving disputes (Larr, 2011). In addition to the legal and customary systems, there are also informal systems of land tenure in the Niger Delta region. These informal systems are based on traditional practices and are not regulated by any formal legal framework. They often involve complex arrangements between individuals and communities and are based on trust and reciprocity. These informal systems can be highly effective in resolving disputes and allocating land, but they can also be subject to abuse.

### **The Environmental Impact of the Oil and Gas Industry in the Region**

It is important to note that there are both positive and negative environmental impacts. On the positive side, the oil and gas industry generates money that can be used for economic development (Aye & Edoja, 2017). On the negative side, the oil and gas industry causes pollution and environmental degradation. The oil and gas industry emits a lot of harmful gases into the atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. These gases contribute to climate change and hurt human health. The industry also releases particulate matter, which can cause respiratory problems. In addition, the oil and gas industry can release volatile organic compounds, which can cause health problems and damage plants and wildlife. There are two main sources of water pollution from the oil and gas industry: surface water and groundwater. Surface water pollution occurs when oil or chemicals are released into rivers, lakes, or the ocean. This can happen when there is a spill, or when wastewater is released. Groundwater pollution occurs when oil or chemicals seep into the groundwater. This can happen when waste is disposed of improperly, or when oil or gas wells leak. Both surface and groundwater pollution can have negative effects on human health, wildlife, and agriculture (Igboama et al., 2022)

### **The Economic Impact of the Oil and Gas Industry in the Region**

The oil and gas industry is a major source of revenue for the Nigerian government. It accounts for about 10% of GDP and 80% of government revenue. However, the wealth from the industry is not evenly distributed, and some areas of the Niger Delta are still very poor (Asagunla & Agbede, 2018). This has led to conflict between local communities and the government over the distribution of oil revenue.



## **Environmental Conflict**

The conflict over oil revenue is only one aspect of the environmental conflict in the Niger Delta. There are also conflicts over land and resource use. For example, the government has granted oil companies concessions to explore and extract oil and gas from large areas of land (Obi, 2009). This has displaced local communities and disrupted their traditional way of life. It has also damaged the environment, which has affected livelihoods, such as fishing and farming. Environmental conflict can be defined as a conflict that is caused by, or related to, environmental issues. The environmental conflict in the Niger Delta is caused by both environmental impacts and economic issues. It has led to violence, human rights abuses, and even armed insurgency. The conflict has impacted the environment, people's health, and their livelihoods. There have been attempts to resolve the conflict, but it is a very complex issue that will take time to resolve.

The environmental conflict in the Niger Delta has been going on for many years, and it has had several impacts. Firstly, it has led to violent conflict between the government and local communities (Idemudia, 2014). There have been some cases of violence, such as the Ogoni Crisis in the 1990s, and the conflict between MEND and the government in the 2000s. For instance, the Bille and Kalabari people are both indigenous communities in Rivers State. The Bille people have both ancestral and legal rights to the land where the Bille 1 and Awoba oil fields are located and have been in conflict with the Kalabari people, who claim that they have ownership of the land. The conflict has led to violence and has caused environmental damage. There have been attempts to resolve the conflict, but it has been ongoing for many years. Unfortunately, the son (Kalabari) trying to make a claim of his mother's (Bille) wealth when the mother is still very much alive (Bille is the mother of Kalabari). The violence has caused death, displacement, and a breakdown of law and order. Secondly, the conflict has led to human rights abuses, such as the violation of indigenous rights, and the use of military force against civilians (Olali, 2023).

The history of the Bille and Kalabari people highlights the complex relationship between property rights and the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta. Before the discovery of oil, the Bille people were generous in giving land to the Kalabari people (Udjoh, 2019). However, with the discovery of oil, the Kalabari people are now claiming ownership of the oil fields. This conflict is not only about land ownership but also about the historical relationship between the two communities and the economic implications of the discovery of oil. Oil exploration and extraction have hurt the environment in the region, including water and air pollution, habitat loss, and damage to agriculture. These environmental impacts have hurt the health and livelihoods of the people living in the region. To provide more context, it's important to understand the nature of oil production in the region. The oil wells are located offshore, and the oil is transported to onshore facilities for processing. These facilities include pipelines, storage tanks, and processing plants. These facilities are often located near communities, and the pollution from them has had a significant impact on the health of the people living nearby (Shukla & Karki, 2016). Oil spills are also common, and they can cause major damage to the environment. However, the flaring of natural gas is a major source of air pollution in the region.

### **Few examples of environmental conflicts involving communities, companies, and the government:**

One example is the conflict between the Ogoni people and the Shell oil company. The Ogoni people have been protesting the negative environmental impact of Shell's operations in the region for many years (Zimmer, 2010). This has led to a violent conflict, with the government

using force to suppress the protests. Another example is the conflict between the Ijaw people and the Nigerian government over oil pollution and the distribution of oil wealth. This conflict has also led to violence and human rights abuses.

Again, a conflict between the Itsekiri people and the Chevron oil company. The Itsekiri people have been protesting the pollution caused by Chevron's operations in the region, and have filed several lawsuits against the company (Obiakor & Usiemure, 2021). This conflict has also led to violence and has been exacerbated by the competition for land and resources between the Itsekiri and the Ijaw people. One more example is the conflict between the Urhobo people and the Nigerian government over the construction of a dam on the Escravos River.

### **Types of Environmental Conflict (conflict over resources, pollution, and the impact of development projects)**

There are a few different types of environmental conflict (Scheidel et al., 2020).

**Conflict Over Resources:** The first type is conflict over resources, such as competition for land, water, and other natural resources. A classic example of this type of conflict is the conflict between the pastoralist Fulani people and the sedentary farmers of Nigeria's Middle Belt region. The Fulani people raise livestock, while the farmers grow crops. The conflict is over access to land and water resources, as the Fulani people's herds often destroy crops and pollute water sources. This conflict has been exacerbated by climate change, which has led to more competition for resources.

**Conflict Over Pollution:** The second type is conflict over pollution, such as the impact of oil pollution on communities. Another example is the conflict over oil pollution in the Niger Delta region. Oil production in the region has led to water and soil pollution, as well as air pollution from gas flaring. This has had a significant impact on the health and livelihoods of the local communities, who have not been compensated for the damage. In addition, the pollution has damaged the environment and destroyed natural resources, such as fisheries and farmland. This has led to conflict between the communities and the oil companies, as well as between the communities and the government.

**Conflict Over the Impact of Development Projects:** The third type is conflict over the impact of development projects, such as the construction of dams, roads, and other infrastructure. These different types of conflict often overlap and can be interconnected (Unruh et al., 2019). One example is the conflict over the construction of the Bakolori Dam in northwestern Nigeria. The construction of the dam displaced thousands of people and led to the loss of farmland and other resources (Okunola & Ikuomola, 2010). The displaced people were not adequately compensated, and the dam has not delivered the promised benefits of increased irrigation and power generation. This has led to continued conflict between the affected communities and the government.

In other words, conflict over resources can happen when different groups have competing interests in using a natural resource. Conflict over pollution can happen when people are negatively affected by pollution from an industrial activity. Conflict over the impact of development projects can happen when people are affected by the construction or operation of a development project.

### **Property Rights and Environmental Conflict**

There is a strong connection between the two. When people have secure property rights, they are more likely to take care of the environment and sustainably manage natural resources

(Reed et al., 2009). On the other hand, when property rights are insecure or uncertain, people may be more likely to engage in environmentally destructive activities, such as over-exploitation of resources. Interestingly, a lack of property rights can lead to conflict over natural resources. Property rights can play a key role in either causing or resolving environmental conflict. When people have secure property rights, they are more likely to take care of the environment and work together to find solutions to environmental problems. On the other hand, when people do not have secure property rights, they may feel like they have no choice but to use the environment destructively, or to engage in conflict with others over the use of resources. This can create a vicious cycle, where environmental conflict leads to insecurity of property rights, which leads to more conflict. For instance, the court case over the Bille 1 oil field that is under the operation of Eroton Exploration and Production Company Limited has led to the insecurity of property rights and has made it difficult for the Bille people who are the rightful landlords of the oil field to benefit from the revenue it generates, royalty, corporate social responsibility projects, etc. (Rexer, 2022).

Moreover, if there is a lot of environmental conflict in an area, it can make people feel insecure about their property rights. For example, if there is conflict over access to a forest, people may not feel like they can safely use the forest, and they may be afraid that someone else will take their land. This insecurity can lead to further conflict, as people may fight to protect their land, or may feel like they have nothing to lose by destructively using the environment. This conflict can lead to insecurity over property rights, as people may be afraid that they will not be able to use the oil field in the future. This insecurity can lead to further conflict, as people may feel like they need to fight to secure their access to the oil field. This can create a cycle of environmental conflict, where each new conflict leads to more insecurity and more conflict (Abbass, 2012).

A great example of how property rights and environmental conflict are connected is the problem of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest. Many people in the Amazon region have insecure property rights to the land they live on, and as a result, they may resort to clearing the land for farming or logging. This can lead to deforestation, which has some negative impacts on the environment, such as habitat loss and increased greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, this deforestation can lead to conflict between local communities, who may feel like they have a right to use the land, and the government, which may try to enforce environmental regulations.

Another good example is the conflict over oil and gas resources in the Niger Delta. As I mentioned before, many people in the region have insecure property rights to the land they live on, and as a result, they may feel that they have no choice but to accept oil exploration and drilling on their land. This has led to conflict between local communities and oil companies, as well as between local communities and the government. In addition, the pollution and environmental damage caused by the oil industry have hurt the health and livelihoods of the local communities (Babatunde, 2020). It is also important to consider the role of government policy in this relationship. In many cases, governments can play a role in either exacerbating or mitigating environmental conflict. For example, in the case of the Niger Delta, the Nigerian government has often sided with oil companies in disputes with local communities. This has led to further conflict and resentment, as the government is seen as siding with outside interests rather than the interests of the local people.

Property rights can lead to conflict between communities and companies, mostly, when a company wants to use a resource that is on land owned by a community, there can be a conflict over who has the right to use that resource (Bennett & Dearden, 2014). This is known as "resource tenure conflict." For example, let's say that a company wants to use land owned



by a local community to build a factory. The company and the community may disagree about who has the right to use the land for the factory. The company may claim that it has a legal right to the land, while the community may claim that it has a customary right to the land. This can lead to a conflict between the two parties, as they both have different ideas about who should control the resource.

One example is the conflict between local communities and Shell in the Niger Delta. The local communities have complained that Shell's operations have caused a lot of environmental damage, such as oil spills and pollution of water sources. They have also complained that they have not been properly compensated for the damage to their land and livelihoods. The conflict has led to insecurity of property rights, as the communities have been afraid that Shell's operations could force them to leave their land. This insecurity has led to further conflict, as the communities have protested and even attacked Shell's facilities. *Ogale and Bille v. Shell* case, which is currently being heard by the UK Supreme Court is also an example (Sachs, 2016; Sampath, 2021). The case involves two communities in the Niger Delta, Ogale and Bille, who are suing Shell for environmental damage caused by oil spills in their communities.

The case is significant because it's one of the first times that a UK court is considering the liability of a multinational company for environmental damage caused overseas. It is also interesting because it is a case of communities using the legal system to try to hold a company accountable for its actions. It is a landmark case that raises questions about the responsibilities of companies for the actions of their subsidiaries. In this case, the plaintiffs are arguing that Shell is responsible for the actions of its Nigerian subsidiary, which is the company that operates the oil facilities in the Niger Delta. Shell has argued that it cannot be held liable for the actions of its subsidiary.

### **How does the Lack of Clear and Enforceable Property Rights Contribute to Conflict?**

One issue is that the customary land tenure system in the Niger Delta is not well-defined or enforced. In many cases, there is no clear legal framework for determining who owns land, and how land can be used (Azadi, 2020). This creates uncertainty and conflict because it is not clear who has the right to make decisions about the land. It is also difficult to resolve disputes because there is no clear legal process for doing so. The lack of an effective legal system has led to violence and intimidation, rather than legal remedies.

This lack of clear property rights also creates a power imbalance, because it gives companies like Shell an advantage over local communities. The companies have the resources to hire lawyers and lobbyists, and to navigate the legal system (Hertel-Fernandez, 2019). This puts them in a stronger position than the local communities, who often lack the resources to fight back. The lack of clear and enforceable property rights makes it difficult for local communities to protect their interests, and to get justice when they are harmed.

One other factor that contributes to conflict is the fact that oil wealth is unevenly distributed in the Niger Delta. Some communities have benefited from oil wealth, while others have been left behind. This has led to resentment and conflict, as those who have not benefited feel like they are being exploited (Akpabio & Akpan, 2010). The lack of a fair distribution of oil wealth also undermines efforts to build trust and cooperation between communities and companies. It is hard to resolve conflict when people feel like they are being exploited or left behind.

Another consequence of the lack of clear property rights is that it creates incentives for destructive practices. For example, since it is not clear who has the right to use resources like

forests, there is an incentive to extract as much as possible from the environment, before someone else does (McKean, 2000). This leads to practices like slash-and-burn agriculture, overfishing, and illegal logging. These practices are not sustainable, and they hurt the environment and the local communities.

One other consequence of the lack of clear property rights is that it undermines efforts to create a sustainable economy in the region. Without clear property rights, it's difficult to invest in long-term economic development. This keeps the region trapped in a cycle of poverty and conflict. Creating clear property rights could help to break this cycle, and to create a more sustainable future for the Niger Delta (Charles Jr, et al., 2017).

Above all, the lack of clear and enforceable property rights in the Niger Delta has created several challenges. It has led to a power imbalance, destructive practices, and a lack of sustainable economic development as well as created uncertainty and competition over resources, which has led to conflict such as conflict over land ownership, conflict over resource extraction, and conflict between communities. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort to create a system of property rights that is fair and effective. This will require cooperation between the government, companies, and local communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper concluded that Niger Delta has been called "The Unspoken Curse" because of the resource curse that plagues the region. However, the real curse is not just the abundance of natural resources, but the lack of clear and enforceable property rights. Without these property rights, the region is trapped in a cycle of conflict, power imbalances, and destructive practices. If these challenges are not addressed, the Niger Delta will continue to suffer from poverty, environmental degradation, and conflict. Furthermore, it is important to note that the lack of clear property rights is not just a problem for the Niger Delta, but for many other regions of the world. In countries like Peru, Indonesia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, similar challenges exist. This highlights the importance of understanding the role of property rights in a region's economic development and environmental sustainability. If we can address this issue, we can help to break the cycle of poverty and conflict in regions like the Niger Delta.

## **Suggestion**

In answering the unspoken curse of the Niger Delta and why property rights are destroying a region, the following suggestions were made:

- Government should ensure the establishment of a clear system of property rights that takes into account both legal and customary rights. This could involve creating a system of land registration that recognizes both legal and customary claims and establishing a process for resolving conflicts.
- The government and companies should involve local communities in decision-making around oil production and environmental management. This could involve establishing local committees to oversee the operations of oil companies, and ensuring that the communities are consulted on decisions that affect them.
- The government and companies should provide compensation for the communities affected by oil pollution. This could include financial compensation, as well as investments in community development projects.

- The government and companies should improve the way that local communities are consulted and engaged in decision-making about natural resource management and development projects. This can involve establishing effective community consultation processes and making sure that there is meaningful participation from all stakeholders.
- The government and companies should have a transparent and accountable system for distributing any benefits that are generated by these projects.
- The government and companies should improve environmental regulation, such as by establishing and enforcing strong environmental laws and regulations. This can help to ensure that companies follow best practices for reducing pollution and managing natural resources.
- The government and companies should have an effective system for monitoring and enforcing these laws and regulations.
- The government and companies should create clearer and more secure property rights, which can help to reduce conflict and encourage sustainable use of the environment. This can be done through things like formal land titling programs, which provide legal documentation of land ownership.

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