GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2020

Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South

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Operational team
Valeria Betancourt (APC)
Alan Finlay (APC)
Maja Romano (APC)

Project coordination team
Valeria Betancourt (APC)
Cathy Chen (APC)
Flavia Fascendini (APC)
Alan Finlay (APC)
Leila Nachawati (APC)
Lori Nordstrom (APC)
Maja Romano (APC)

GISWatch 2020 advisory committee
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Jennifer Radloff (APC)
Chat Garcia Ramilo (APC)
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Arun M. (SPACE Kerala)
Florencia Roveri (Nodo TAU)
Y. Z. Yaú (CITAD)
Joan Carling (Indigenous Peoples Rights International)

Project coordinator
Maja Romano (APC)

Editor
Alan Finlay (APC)

Assistant editor and proofreading
Lori Nordstrom (APC)

Publication production support
Cathy Chen (APC)

Graphic design
Monocromo

Cover illustration
Matías Bervejillo

NIGERIA

DEPLOYING ICTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN THE NIGERIAN NIGER DELTA

**African Centre for Climate Actions
and Rural Development**
Freeman Elohor Oluowo
www.accard.org

Introduction

In Nigeria, information and communications technologies (ICTs) have yet to be properly used for sustainable development, especially when it comes to environmental and climate change governance. Despite the growth of the ICT sector in the country, and with nearly half of Nigerians online, the poor deployment of ICTs is increasingly evident across economic sectors and resulting in a snail-pace realisation of sustainable development goals.

The concept of sustainable development is not new to Nigeria – it has featured in nearly every policy and development document as well as in government applications for international funding or grants where it is often part of the funding criteria. Yet the inability of successive governments to effectively implement and document steps taken towards attaining its sustainable development goals is still a concern for stakeholders.

The ineffective use of ICTs for monitoring and control in the environmental sector in particular has weakened institutions and regulatory efforts, and hampered the ability of civil society to advocate for environmental rights. For example, there is still no comprehensive database on oil production, spillages and gas flares in the Niger Delta, the main energy-producing region in the country. Regulation of the industry in the region, including the issuing of fines, is mostly done through guesswork, creating a context that is rife with corruption with adverse effects on the local population. This report outlines the need for a comprehensive database on the energy sector in the Niger Delta, especially with regard to the oil and gas sectors. This is necessary so that the country can take informed steps towards meeting its sustainable development goals and reduce corruption in the energy sector, and for civil society organisations to take action to secure environmental justice in the region.

Background

Nigeria is an oil-dependent country. It is a signatory to several international agreements after the 1987 UN Brundtland Report on the environment and development,[1] including the respective 1992 and 2015 Rio de Janeiro conferences on environment and development.[2] In line with the objectives of the 2012 Rio Earth Summit, Nigeria has committed to urgently meet the environment, political and economic challenges facing our world, especially in the developing countries, through beginning to adopt green economy policies.[3]

Many countries have started to address the environmental, social and economic challenges confronting them by adapting the principles of sustainable development in local laws and policies. However, others, including Nigeria, are yet to fully maximise the gains and objectives of these meetings, to either meet their development goals or raise environmental standards.

For instance, gas flaring – where natural gas from petroleum extraction is burned off rather than being removed by safer means – and other forms of environmental pollution such as oil spillages still characterise the Nigerian Niger Delta. Unregulated artisanal coal mining and illegal gold mining are on the increase in the North, typically being done at the expense of the environment and livelihood of the people. Other common environmental problems include erosion, desertification and flooding across the country despite the policies being formulated and human capacity already built to deal with these issues.

Nigeria is listed among the countries still far from achieving sustainable development by 2030. Part of this is due to the lack of investment in ICTs, and poor environmental and climate governance. In addition, the conflicting roles of multiple government agencies are hampering developmental efforts.

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Common_Future

2 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20

3 Federal Government of Nigeria. (2012). *Nigeria's Path to Sustainable Development through Green Economy: Country Report to the Rio+20 Summit.* https://www.ng.undp.org/content/dam/nigeria/docs/Sustainable%20Development/UNDP_NG_SustDev_NigeriaCountryReport_RIO_2013.pdf

Poor ICT deployment has also contributed to the corruption in the environmental sector, as government agencies are yet to properly document and monitor the operations of the energy sector and other industrial activities. The impact of these operations not only has implications for environmental degradation, but threatens the peaceful coexistence of corporations and host communities in the affected areas, in particular in the Niger Delta. The lack of monitoring is limiting the role of non-state actors, especially civil society organisations, to intervene – sustainable interventions are impossible without access to a reliable database and online information resources.

Therefore, there is a need to urgently address the underlying political, management and monitoring gaps leading to the corruption in the sector. This is important if Nigeria is to meet the targets of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which is just under nine years away, and not repeat the country's sad experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ended in 2015.

The Niger Delta

Nigeria is ranked among the top oil-producing countries in the world, and is the highest oil producer in Africa. It is the most populous black nation, estimated at 201 million people in 2019,[4] covering a land area of 923,768 square kilometres. It is politically and administratively managed under six zones which take both economic and development decisions on oil sales.

Crude oil, which was first discovered in commercial quantities in 1958, and has since become the economic mainstay of Nigeria, comes from the Niger Delta region. The region includes Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Abia, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo states. This region hosts most of the oil and gas company activities, yet is one of the poorest and most environmentally neglected areas in Nigeria.[5]

Despite the agitation and displeasure from the people, which led to the hostility and militancy in the region, the level of underdevelopment, injustices and environmental neglect are unfathomable and not seen elsewhere.

For example, Shell and Eni Oil (the operator of the Nigerian Agip Oil Company) are the two biggest oil corporations working in the Niger Delta and have admitted causing a large number of oil spills with significant damage to the environment and livelihoods.[6] While Shell reported spilling 17.5 million litres in 2011, Eni Oil reported spilling 4.1 million litres in 2014. However, the insincerity in reporting oil spillages and poor environmental clean-up of impacted sites are partly the reasons civil society organisations, including Amnesty International, are demanding the Nigerian government to re-open 89 oil spill investigations.[7] Amnesty International has referred to the Niger Delta as one of the most polluted places on Earth.[8]

In 2019, the National Oil Spill Response Agency (NOSDRA), the government organisation saddled with the responsibility of surveillance, compliance, coordination of oil spill responses and enforcement of environmental policies in the petroleum sector in Nigeria, documented 583 cases of oil spillages due to old and faulty equipment, corrosion and sabotage. Unfortunately, only 50 of these cases were reported completed.[9]

They also reported eight fugitive emissions, that is, emissions of gases or vapour from pressured equipment due to leaks and other unintended or irregular releases of gases mostly from industrial activities;[10] eight vented emissions, that is, the discharge of unburned gases into the atmosphere, often carried out to maintain safe conditions during the different phases of the process;[11] and six incomplete combustion and/or emissions, a situation where there is not enough oxygen to allow the fuel to react completely with oxygen to produce carbon dioxide and water.

Meanwhile, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was formed by the Indigenous people of Ogoni in 1990 to campaign for greater control over the oil and gas resources on their land. They want autonomy over their affairs, including their economic development, and the restoration of the damaged environment. Other organisations active in the Niger Delta include the Centre for Environment and Sustainable Livelihood Projects (CESLP), Environmental Right Actions (ERA) and the

4   Aluko, O. (2019, 30 April). ICYMI: Nigeria's population now 201 million – UN. *Punch*. https://punchng.com/nigerias-population-now-201-million-un

5   National Bureau of Statistics. (2020). *2019 Poverty and inequality in Nigeria*. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1092

6   https://reports.shell.com/sustainability-report/2011/ouractivities/deliveringenergyresponsibly/nigeria/oilspillsandflaring.html?cat=m

7   Amnesty International. (2018). *Negligence in the Niger Delta: Decoding Shell and ENI's Poor Record on Oil Spills*. https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR4479702018ENGLISH.PDF

8   https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/niger-delta-oil-spills-decoders

9   Nigerian Oil Spill Detection Response Agency (NOSDRA). (2019). *2019 National Oil Spill Database*. Unpublished document.

10   EnviroNews Nigeria. (2019, 20 October). Group decries cases of oil facility explosion, spillages in Niger Delta. https://www.environewsnigeria.com/group-frowns-at-the-growing-cases-of-oil-facility-explosion-spillages-in-niger-delta

11   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gas_venting

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF). All of their activities are constrained by the lack of available information on the environment.

Current advocacies are driven by incident reports and field assessments of environmental damage. However, despite these efforts, there is a lack of a strong evidence base to support advocacy in a sector that lacks transparency and accountability, making it difficult for civil society to raise the alarm on human and environmental rights abuses. For example, the Ogoni Youth Movement only recently discovered through a court process that the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to clean up the Niger Delta region was not legally constituted under an act of parliament and cannot be held responsible for poor job delivery and deliberate abandonment of some of the remediation sites by contractors.[12] This is after already disbursing over USD 360 million of some USD 900 million recommended by UNEP.[13]

Sustainable development in Nigeria

Despite 62 years of the oil boom, there has been little meaningful development in Nigeria in terms of availability of basic infrastructure and amenities such as electricity, running water and roads. The majority of the population are still very poor, rural, and with a living standard below USD 1 per day.[14]

Things are unlikely to improve in the near future, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent economic lockdown and drop in global oil prices. According to a World Bank report, the country's general government revenue will decrease from an already low 8% percent of GDP in 2019 to a projected 5% in 2020, especially as crude oil contributes 80% to Nigerian revenue. The report as a result projected a poverty increase of over seven million, which is a rise from 40.1% in 2019 to 40.5 % in 2020, and the worst recession in four decades in Nigeria.[15]

The foregoing is on top of the unsustainable economic management and financial recklessness of the successive governments. Surprisingly (and

worryingly), the present administration resorted to both external and internal borrowing just two weeks into the global COVID-19 economic lockdown in March 2020 to drive the country's economic growth plan.[16]

Politics and inconsistent policies in Nigeria are making it impossible to achieve sustainable development in the different economic sectors. For example, the Nigeria reality contradicts the country's own 2012 report to the Rio+20 Summit.[17] The report took stock of the country's achievements in the implementation of Agenda 21, the global environmental plan adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit to reduce poverty and to ensure social equitability and environmentally sustainable development.

In the report, Nigeria was ranked among the most urbanised countries in the world, with a growth rate of 49.8%, which was expected to increase to 56.8% and 63.6% in 2020 and 2030, respectively (contradicting the 2020 World Bank and NBS reports).[18] As a result of the enormous challenges of electricity supply and a bad road network across the country on the one hand, and the limited access to safe water and sanitation in the rural areas on the other, the 2012 projections are far from being true. At the same time, claims in the report that agriculture, which is the main non-oil sector in the country, increased partly due to agricultural policy and institutional support by government to farmers, lacked evidence and statistics to measure progress.

Notable environmental policies and plans in Nigeria

The country has a well-developed national policy on the environment,[19] and there are several principles of sustainable development and environmental management embedded in the 1999 constitution.[20] However, not much has been achieved in environmental and climate management, despite the policy and capacity-building efforts.

The Nigerian environment is under increasing threat from natural and human-induced disasters

12 Yafugborhi, E. (2020, 30 July). Ogoni Cleanup: We're shocked HYPREP is unknown to law – Ogoni Youths. *Vanguard*. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/ogoni-cleanup-were-shocked-hyprep-is-unknown-to-law-%E2%80%95-ogoni-youths

13 Nwagbara, C. (2020, 18 February). NNPC, JV Partners Spend $360 million on Ogoni clean up. *Nairametrics*. https://nairametrics.com/2020/02/18/nnpc-jv-partners-spend-360-million-on-ogoni-clean-up

14 World Bank. (2020, 25 June). Nigeria Development Update: Rebuilding After COVID-19. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/publication/nigeria-development-update-rebuilding-after-covid19

15 Ibid.

16 International Monetary Fund. (2020, 28 April). IMF Executive Board Approves US$ 3.4 Billion in Emergency Support to Nigeria to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic. https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/04/28/pr20191-nigeria-imf-executive-board-approves-emergency-support-to-address-covid-19; Osae-Brown, A., & Soto, A. (2020, 6 April). Nigeria to Borrow $6.9 Billion to Counter Coronavirus Spread. *Bloomberg*. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-06/nigeria-to-borrow-6-9-billion-to-offset-virus-impact-on-economy

17 Federal Government of Nigeria. (2012). Op. cit.

18 World Bank. (2020, 25 June). Op. cit.; National Bureau of Statistics. (2020). Op. cit.

19 https://www.climatechange.gov.ng/national-policy-on-climate-change

20 Federal Government of Nigeria. (2012). Op. cit.

such as drought, flooding and erosion due to unsustainable use of forest resources, as well as environmental pollution, according to the 2012 Rio report.

Gas flares are normal in the Nigerian oil and gas sector, and go unmonitored. There is also a growing concern among environmental defenders and rights groups who are unhappy with the continued extension of Nigeria's emission reduction deadlines to meet the country's climate commitments. Nigeria is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% unconditionally and 45% with international support by 2030 in meeting the country's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Although the country has developed sectoral action plans for its implementation,[21] not much has been achieved.

A recent study of the implementation of the country's NDC and the Niger Delta oil and gas contribution to climate change concluded that the oil and gas sector contributes massively to the greenhouse gas emissions in the Niger Delta and elsewhere,[22] and may be responsible for the country not meeting its NDC targets. Other reports blame poor monitoring and governance,[23] low investment in ICTs,[24] and corruption in the sector,[25] which benefit the oil and gas companies.

Benefits of using ICTs in oil and gas monitoring and incident reporting

The monitoring of industrial emissions and oil and gas activities is still very poor, and has led to several cases of oil spillages and gas flares going undocumented. Blame is typically placed on faulty equipment and poor installation, low operational standards and unskilled manpower, and in some cases, vandalism. Therefore, deploying ICTs to monitor operations will not only raise environmental standards but also increase transparency and accountability in the sector. It will also reduce the challenges that civil society organisations face in accessing environmental information, especially with regard to gas flares and oil spillage data.

The few civil society organisations working on environmental justice in the Niger Delta rely on scanty information and incident reports and photos published in newspapers to carry out advocacy. While civil society organisations find it difficult to access government and real-time environmental data, most academic reports end up either on the researcher's shelves or in institutional libraries. Most of the reports available online lack data integrity and comprehensiveness of information.

In order to address the paucity of information in the energy sector, especially the petroleum subsector in the Niger Delta, there is an urgent need to properly integrate ICTs into sector governance, including developing a comprehensive and easy-to-access database that includes the results of academic studies. Because of this, there is a need for civil society organisations and academia to collaborate better.

It is also important for civil society organisations to build in-house capacity, and to push a common front in advocacy for open data management, including the enforcement of the open government policy which Nigeria has signed. New legislation such as the recently promulgated social media and hate speech acts is also a concern, because it is already hampering the right to access information enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. There are a growing number of arrests of journalists, sanctions and other restrictions that have resulted from the law.

Conclusion

In most developing economies like Nigeria, ICT investment and deployment in sectors is still very low, even though ICTs are seen as the solution to curb the corruption and maladministration that has bedevilled sector development, including environmental and climate governance. ICTs can promote transparency and accountability, which are key to achieving the outlined environmental, social and economic development goals in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The Niger Delta people are suffering social, economic and environment abuses despite the country being signatory to important environmental agreements. While some environmental rights activists like the late Ken Saro Wiwa have been killed, others have been silenced by being arrested for daring to

21 Federal Ministry of Environment. (2017). *Sectoral Action Plans for Nigeria's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*. http://dhq.climatechange.gov.ng/Documents/final-nigeria-ndc-sector-action-plans.pdf

22 FUPRE/ACCARD Study Team. (2019). *Greenhouse Gases Emission of the Oil and Gas Companies in the Nigerian Niger Delta from 2018 to 2019, and the implementation level of the Paris Agreement in Reducing GHG*. Unpublished document.

23 Karanasios, S. (2012). *New & Emergent ICTs and Climate Change in Developing Countries*. Centre for Development Informatics, Institute for Development Policy and Management. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261634361_New_Emergent_ICTs_and_Climate_Change_in_Developing_Countries

24 Jaiyesimi, R. (2016). The Challenge of Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa: The Way Forward. *African Journal of Reproductive Health, 20*, 13-18.

25 Ojo, A. O., & Oluwatayo, I. B. (2016). *Drivers and Challenges of Sustainable Development in Africa*.

challenge the status quo. The recent promulgation and enforcement of the social media regulation act is another barrier for environmental rights groups, who will need evidence-based information and reliable data to stay afloat.

COVID-19 has exposed not only the poor health care systems and heightened poverty in the country, but the lockdown has increased human rights abuses by the government. The pandemic has shown a weakened government that is unable to provide palliatives to cushion the effects of the economic lockdown and sit-at-home order on citizens.

Meanwhile, the borrowing by the government in the first week of the lockdown and the collapse of oil prices provide little hope for both the present and future generations of Nigerians.

While corruption and underdevelopment in the different sectors persist, the lack of a proper monitoring system for the oil and gas industry means in practice that regulators make decisions and issue fines based on guesswork, and the advocacy role of civil society is crippled.

Action steps

The following key action steps are necessary in the Niger Delta:

- There is a need for civil society organisations to build in-house capacity to tackle issues relating to sustainable development, including climate action.

- Civil society organisations should collaborate with academia to develop a shared database with reliable sector data and information that can be used for advocacy.

- Civil society should develop a collective campaign for the Nigerian government to enact its open government policy.

- Civil society should advocate for limitations to the recent social media and hate speech act which is negatively affecting the right to access information and freedom of speech in the country.

Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South

The world is facing an unprecedented climate and environmental emergency. Scientists have identified human activity as primarily responsible for the climate crisis, which together with rampant environmental pollution, and the unbridled activities of the extractive and agricultural industries, pose a direct threat to the sustainability of life on this planet.

This edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) seeks to understand the constructive role that technology can play in confronting the crises. It disrupts the normative understanding of technology being an easy panacea to the planet's environmental challenges and suggests that a nuanced and contextual use of technology is necessary for real sustainability to be achieved. A series of thematic reports frame different aspects of the relationship between digital technology and environmental sustainability from a human rights and social justice perspective, while 46 country and regional reports explore the diverse frontiers where technology meets the needs of both the environment and communities, and where technology itself becomes a challenge to a sustainable future.

APC

Sida