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Multinational oil corporations, policy violation and environmental damage in rivers state of Nigeria: a theistic ethics approach

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Achieving a sustainable environment is not unconnected with a pragmatic adherence to environmental policies in any given society. The continuous and expanding experience of environmental degradation and its attendant consequences on human and other lives in Rivers State of Nigeria still call for urgent attention for enduring solution. Yet, it seems that all efforts made toward resolving the problem have yielded very few positive results because the root cause of the problem(s) has not been given adequate attention. This study explored the organic connectedness between breaches (i.e., policy violation) of environmental regulations (as a major cause of the problem) and environmental chaos (as the consequence of the breach) in Rivers State of Nigeria, from the theistic ethics standpoint. To investigate the actuality of the connectedness of the breaches and the incessant environmental decadence in the study location, 30 copies of self-constructed, close-ended questionnaire were administered to a purposively selected sample of 30 Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) of the major oil business firms across the entire three Senatorial Districts of Rivers State. Out of the 30 administered questionnaire, 26 valid copies (86.7%) were retrieved and analysed, using frequencies, simple percentage counts, and regression analysis. A total of 88.5% of the CLOs confirmed that breaches in fundamental environmental policies were major causes of the environmental chaos and other associated problems in Rivers State, Nigeria. Also, pipeline vandalism, oil spillages, and oil theft typified breaches of theistic and other environmental regulations with ecological consequences. The *F*-test from the regression analysis shows that the value of *F*-calculated (6.633) is greater than *F*-tabulated (3.86) taking cognizant of the *P*-value of 0.01, which is lesser than 0.05 level of probability. This confirmed a significant relationship between contravention of law and ethical principles, and environmental degradation in Rivers State. Furthermore, the value of coefficient of correlation (*r*) is 0.126. This confirmed a positive relationship between violation of environmental policies (*X*) and environmental degradation (*Y*) in Rivers State. The paper concluded that adherence to the theistic and other environmental policies by oil firms in Rivers State could serve as respite to the environment.

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Introduction

Rivers State and the entire Niger Delta area of Nigeria have been particularly attractive to major multinational oil corporations (MNCs) including Shell, Chevron, Exxon-Mobil, Total, FinaElf, Agip and Texaco. These MNCs have all been involved in joint ventures with the Federal Government of Nigeria in connection with oil exploration and production in the area (Yahaya, 2019). Their activities in the area have brought about mixed results, with the harmful effects being greater, especially as it relates to the localities where oil is exploited. The negative consequences like acid rains, deforestation, destruction of farm lands, severe joblessness and hunger, vandalism and killing of the youth have often resulted from violence against nature (Akpuh and Ako, 2019), which is considered as a breach of the divine environmental policy in this paper.

Evidences of the contribution of the oil MNCs to the abuse of the environment and the attendant consequences can be seen in the following observations about the operations of Shell in the area. Shell is chosen for this case because it is the oldest of all oil MNCs in Nigeria. Shell has been involved in all three phases of petroleum business in Nigeria, which consist of the pre-civil war years (1956–66), the civil war period (1967–70), and the post-civil war era (1971 till present) (Akpuh and Ako, 2019). Shell has also been a leading violator of the diverse environmental principles, leading to the corporation being one of the worst, if not the worst, degrader of the environment. Shell's rate of pollution of the environment was about 600,000 bpd of oily water. These were from both intentional and accidental discharges, which flowed from Shell's pipeline networks of covering over 31,000 square kilometres of land as at 2006. The abandoned Oloibiri oil well sites and the adjoining environs have since become waste lands and waters (Akpuh and Ako, 2019; Federal Government of Nigeria, FGN, 2006).

Religion has started playing more important roles (one would say) in the events that take place in our contemporary societies, than it did before the twentieth century. It has become an important basis for anchoring the discussions and explanations of the conventional models and theories meant for understanding phenomena in human societies (Raimi et al., 2014). In fact, environmental theology has evolved, since the 1960s, as a subfield of environmental studies that is evidently conditioned by biblical exegesis, with a fairly continuous link with Genesis 1:28 (Hodson and Hodson, 2017). Corroborating the foregoing is the fact that biblical injunctions, regarding the environment, obviously provide tangible basis for understanding the moral and ethical dimensions of human relations with the environment. For this study, such understanding applies to the business environment in particular, especially regarding the need for corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a moral obligation for the conscious protection of the environment. It is on this basis that this paper sought to explain the challenges and problems of environmental decadence in Rivers State through the theistic approach, pinpointing the connection between the deductive environmental principles contained in the *Torah*, the philosophy of CSR, and the effects of negligence of such 'policies' on the environment and the people in Rivers State.

The *Torah* in Israel could be seen as contemporary 'policy' necessary for the preservation and promotion of life (Hayes, 2002). Unfortunately, it appears that ignorance and deliberate disobedience to the *Torah* have so worsened the original condition of the orderliness and goodness of the earth, especially in terms of its conduciveness for human habitation, that issues regarding how to resolve the problems generated and how to rejuvenate the ecosystems, have become global and collective burdens of the human race (Josiah and Amah, 2013). In the scheme of events, Nigeria is one of the global locations that have

been terribly affected by this occurrence. Addressing the effect of damage on the environment, Sharma (1992) states that the ecosystems are no longer safe; their unsafe condition has largely been engendered by the activities of humans. Accordingly, this study was initiated with the assumption that there is a relationship among violation of divine or theistic policies on people's interaction with their environment and the current environmental degradation and its consequences in Rivers State of Nigeria. The reality of this claim was sought through the application of the theistic ethics approach (Perkins, 2020) and Aquinas' (1993) paradigmatic theory of Natural Law. Paradigmatic is used to project the theistic (as against the atheistic) nature of the theory. The fundamental principle of the paradigmatic natural law is that 'good' is to be done and 'evil' avoided. To Aquinas, the natural law is a participation in the eternal law where the eternal law is that rational plan by which all creation is ordered, while the natural law is the way that the human being "participates" in the eternal law. Thus, it is on the premise of eternal law being a guide or plan and natural law being an embodiment of such guides that this study perceives the *Torah* (i.e., theistic policy) as law that is applicable to people's relations with their environment.

From the foregoing, the major thrust of this paper is that negligence to the knowledge of God (i.e., disregard for theistic and related policies on the environment) is the cause of the perpetual environmental degradation in Rivers State. Thus, the paper sought to establish the link between negligence to theistic environmental policy and environmental degradation in Rivers State.

Theoretical framework

Theistic ethics approach. At this juncture, it is important to state that the myriad arguments for or against theistic ethics approach are not the concerns of this discourse, but how the tenets of the approach explains the consequences of environmental degradation in the geographical location of this study. Theistic ethics approach to explaining phenomena and seeking solution to human problems is the avowal that God exists and solely prescribes (or informs the prescription for) the right codes of conduct for people in their milieus. It avers that violation of such ethical codes usually lead to unwanted effects, which sometimes assume crisis proportions. Also, that it is only within the confines of such policies that solution to human sufferings can be found. For this study, the approach is anchored on Christian religious beliefs on the existence and revelation of God to mankind through the four related ways averred by Perkins (2020): God's creation, the Holy Scriptures, the person of Jesus Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Borrowing from Perkins (2020), theistic ethics approach, as applied to this study, asserts that: (1) God is the source of all knowledge; (2) God sets the leading example for people to emulate as codes of conduct; (3) people must follow the order and principles established by God, for them to enjoy the good of their milieu; (4) people usually struggle with making the right decision for every particular situation; (5) the struggle with making the right decision for, and taking the appropriate action in every specific situation is a challenge that defies any discrimination of people based on the existence or absence of religious values; (6) the ethical frameworks of the various communities of people evolved from the integration of their religious beliefs, which constitute their general consciousness; and (7) God's ethical framework is infinite and overrides the rationalisations and approvals of the majority or ruling party of any human community or society. The implication of this approach is that people must understand these stated principles about the existence of God, His roles in ordering and guiding the entire body of His creation, and the associated divine policies or

principles, before they can desist from acts that are inimical to the ecosystems and to human beings as well. This is further explained in succeeding section. The basic ethical principle that can be derived from the foregoing approach is that since God made the environment, He is in the best position to recommend how best to care for it. Thus, His recommendations must be followed to avoid crisis.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) theory. In simple terms, Corporate social responsibility (CSR) theory is a form of social contract theory that holds that business entities operating in the society has the obligation to contribute to the welfare of its operational milieu. It contends that beyond the act of operating businesses in accordance with the laws of the society, business entities/organisations owe certain moral obligations to their host communities. While the original propounder of this theory is unclear, it is known to be first proposed by the Protestants in the United States of America. They promoted "...the philosophies of 'public service' and 'stewardship', imploring the elites and aristocrats to support the society and the poor with their wealth" (Raimi et al., 2014: p. 136; Tounés, et al., 2011). This philosophy obviously led business owners to gradually become ethically conscious in their operations. Nevertheless, even though the concept of CSR is an age-long idea that spans many centuries (Carroll, 2008), it started appearing in literature from about the 1930–40s (Carroll, 1999). It gained greater recognition in the contemporary times as a result of the European Commission's, 2004 publication titled *Green Paper on CSR*. The suggestion was that social responsibility could no longer be isolated from the management of European enterprises, but has become an area of daily focus for both business owners and managers (Zelazna et al., 2020). Some of its basic assumptions, which are applicable to this paper include that:

1. Business entities owe their host communities four moral obligations, which are economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic obligations (Carroll, 1979);
2. Business operators must conduct their businesses in strict compliance with law and voluntary consideration of the impacts of their business operations on the environment (Zelazna et al., 2020);
3. Business operators can only be exempted from the stated obligations if they are not making profit Carroll (1979);
4. While seeking to make greater profit, business firms must effectively manage their CSR to ensure sustainability of the environment for future use, in order to avoid ecological disaster (Harari, 2017; Zelazna et al., 2020).

These are the roles that the oil MNCs in Rivers State ought to be playing to ensure sustainability in the area. The extent of observance of these principles by the oil corporations in the state is also evident in the behaviour of Shell in the area. For instance, before the 1960s, Shell-D'Arcy's first response to the complaints of the host communities about the loss of their means of livelihoods to environmental pollution and other related challenges from oil exploration and extraction was to grossly disregard them. This was also manifest in the 1940s, when pressures began to mount very high, and Shell had to follow the colonial government's initiative of making promises and giving concessions to indigenes of the affected communities (Akpuh and Ako, 2019; Raji and Abejide, 2013; CLO, 2002; Nyemutu, 1999). The practice of compensation has been largely preferred by Shell and other MNCs in Nigeria's Delta since the post-independence era. However, such reparations have been mostly inadequate, especially when compared to international standards (Akpuh and Ako, 2019; Omotola, 2007). More so, the MNCs do

not willingly pay the expected reparations and the payments are usually untimely (Sahara Reporters, New York, 2021). For instance, it took Shell a period of about 10 years to agree to pay the sum of ₦45 billion to the people of Ogoni Communities, after the case was ruled by the Federal High Court in Lagos division on June 14, 2010 (Sahara Reporters, New York, 2021). A similar case had taken place in the past, involving a lawsuit against Shell by a group of farmers from Goi and Oruma communities of Rivers State in 2008. It took 13 years and the intervention of a Dutch appeal court for Shell to agree to pay the expected compensations (BBC News, 2021). Nevertheless, these efforts have remained largely unproductive because of the limitations caused by infrastructural shortages, unsustainability of existing projects, growing levels of crime and violence in the area, and poor partnership with the locals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) (Akpuh and Ako, 2019; Federal Government of Nigeria, FGN, 2006).

Linking the CSR theory with the theistic approach. Despite references to ancient Roman and medieval English laws (Agudelo et al., 2019; Chaffee, 2017), the contemporary evolution of CSR was greatly influenced by theological rationalisations about people and the environment. The elements of public service and stewardship found in the CSR assumptions and practices in the contemporary times are anchored on the emotions of selfless and intentional contribution to collective well-being of people and their milieus. The associated philosophies were extracted from the two Testaments of the Bible to inspire ethical consciousness and personal sense of responsibility toward the society (Raimi et al., 2014: p. 136). The Christian religious philosophy and approach of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries assumed that the prevalent and persistent social phenomena of widespread abject poverty within the English Empire and parts of Europe were consequence of moral failure of society. They suggested that such moral negligence that had ravaged the well-being of the society could be reversed to revamp the society. Consequently, social reforms, in line with the stated philosophy, began to evolve. It was on this premise that the Victorian Philanthropy evolved (Agudelo et al., 2019; Carroll, 2008). This was followed by other developments like the involvement of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which was established in 1844 in London, to help apply Christian values to the business activities, and several other welfare schemes within the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

At this juncture, it is important to state that the Christian philosophy that promoted welfare of the society (including the people and their environs) was bi-dimensional. While, on the one hand, it promoted people's welfare and protection of the environment, it also promoted the extreme exploitation of the environment with its attendant consequences, on the other hand. For instance, the misunderstanding of the notion that "...no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes" (White, 1967: p. 1205), which was derived from Gen. 1:28, is responsible for people's careless attitude towards their environment (Josiah and Onyazonwu, 2014). This misinterpreted and misapplied view of the Mediaeval era still persists in the contemporary times with its attendant problems (White, 1967: p. 1205). The effect of this dogma on the environment has been enormous. With this observation in mind, this paper approaches its discourse from a balanced view of the theistic thesis, with the implication that while mankind is authorised to dominate the earth, it is also its responsibility to protect the environment from decay since their survival and sustainability are inevitably interconnected.

Understanding the importance of the Knowledge of God as policy. This portion of the paper was adapted from an article titled *Hosea's Perspective on the 'Knowledge of God' and its Relevance to Rivers State, Nigeria* (Josiah, 2014). This excerpt is relevant to understanding the effects of the *lack of knowledge of God* (*Torah* or policy violation) on the environment. Here, the focus is to establish what constitutes the *knowledge of God*, especially from Prophet Hosea's perspective (Hos. 4:1–3) with a view to understanding its 'lack' as the opposite of possessing the knowledge of God. In the stated discourse, it was established that the lack of practical "knowledge of God" results in swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery and destruction upon a people (Hos. 4:1–3, 6 cf. Isa. 5:13). Submitting that neglecting the *Torah* (divine policy) of Yahweh means rejection of the *knowledge of God*. The paper also linked *chesed* (mutual kindness) with the *Torah* (divine policy), holding that the setting of *chesed* is the family or clan; that the fruitful and productive common life of people in such a clan, family or close human society requires constant mutual kindness on the part of all its members. That is to say, kindness is part of social norms that function to preserve and promote life and strengthen society. *Chesed*, therefore, as part of the social norms, also, tends to be an integral element of Yahweh's *Torah* (divine policy).

Again, the stated paper discovered that the *knowledge of God* could mean "adherence to the *Torah* of Yahweh" (Hos. 4:6), which is regarded as 'divine policy' in this paper, since it is this *Torah* that stipulates the divine requirements needed for the preservation and promotion of life in ancient Israel. Briefly stated, the *knowledge of God* means knowledge interiorised, that is, knowledge issuing in conduct determined by fundamental understanding (Walter, 1976). Hence, the lack of "Knowledge of God" is not the mere absence of the *knowledge of God*, but failure to apply and act in accordance with Yahweh's stipulations (divine policy), which is referred to as *violation of environmental policies and ethical principles* in this paper. It is, therefore, the deviation from adhering to the 'divine policies' of Yahweh that caused dislocation in the entire ecosystem of northern Israel.

Conceptual discourse

Linking ethics, law, and policy. Ethics denotes rules for human behaviour, meant for individual or group conduct or both. According to Perkins (2020), it implies "...mankind's attempt to establish a framework of rules for right living" (p. vi). It is an embodiment of moral codes for acceptable conduct for an individual, group, or organisation. Relatedly, law, in simple terms, denotes codified ethics. On the other hand, policy is any principle or rule meant to guide decisions with the aim of achieving a desired end. From an administrative cum political viewpoint, a further definition of policy is that it "...is a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions" (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015, para. 1). From these definitions, it is obvious that the concept of policy is very ambiguous in terms of its various applications, but simply implies adopted rules of conduct meant to guide choices and actions of people, just like ethics and law. Nevertheless, the following consists of some attributes of similarity and differentiation among these three concepts.

Ethics, policies, and laws are similar in the sense that they both consist of embodiments of principles or rules. Also, each of them provides guidelines that are meant to help people or groups achieve a purpose or set of purposes. Contrarily, they differ in the following ways. First, while ethics and policies simply provide guidelines for specific achievement, without mandating the subjects to comply, laws go further, in many cases, to compel

their subjects to act in a specific manner, with consequences for adherence or breach of the recommended principles. Nevertheless, in either case, adherence to principles (ethics, laws, or policies) has consequences, whether they are enforced or not. While ethics and law are supposed products of morality, policies may not usually be tied to morality.

Also, Rahimi and Emba (2011) opined that while policy is meant to guide decision by merely serving as a procedure or protocol for achieving a set goal, it does not consist of the choice finally made or the outcome thereof; it is, in an ideal sense, an expression of intent tied around the commitment for achieving a set goal. Thus, even though policies (especially in the regulatory sense) can have strict elements of compulsion, individuals or groups still have the express will to observe them strictly, partially, or even totally neglect them. However, they usually, will be held responsible for the consequences of such choices and their outcome(s). It is on the basis of the latter and the observed similarities in function among ethics, law, and policy that this study perceives the *Torah* as a collection of ethics, law, and policy. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that out of the four typologies/classifications of policy (constituent, distributive, redistributive, and regulatory), as originally developed by Theodore Lowi (1972), the type that is of interest to this study is regulatory policy. This is in tandem with Chu's (2016) opinion that in addition to its intent to regulate behaviour, it provides for punishment for failure to comply with the adopted standard. This connects appropriately with the *Torah*, which the next segment discusses in relation with its relevance to the overall deliberation.

The Torah (Knowledge of God) as policy in the old testament.

The *Torah* is an embodiment of the will of Yahweh. Therefore, it is a collection of the expression of the character of God. This feature makes it to be a source of the knowledge of God. In the completed Canon of the Old Testament, Heb: *Torah* technically denotes the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of the Old Testament (Lu. 24:44), as a division of the Old Testament Scripture, which contains the text of the Law, and its history down to the death of Moses, the one through whom the law was given (Rule, 1987). Nevertheless, the Hebrew *Torah* is from Heb: *horah*, the Hiphil of Heb: *jarah*. The root word means "to throw". Hence, in Hiphil the word means "to point out" (as by throwing out the hand), and so "to direct." The Heb: *Torah* is "direction." It could also be simply "human direction," as the "law of thy mother" as found in Proverbs 1:8; but most often in the Old Testament it is the Divine law. In the singular, it often means a law, the plural being used in the same sense; but more frequently Heb: *Torah* in the singular is the general body of divinely given law.

In summary, the *Torah* according to Holladay (2000) could have different shades of meaning as: Direction, instruction asked of God in a given situation (Deut. 17:11; 1:5) and administered by priests (Jer. 18:18); instruction given by men (Prov. 1:8); an established instruction (Lev. 6:2); portions required by the law (Neh. 12:44); summation/contents of the laws (2 kgs 10:31); any set of regulations (Exod. 12; Lev. 7:37; Num. 5:29). From the foregoing, it could be deduced that what constitutes the right and good social conduct was most probably the content of the *Torah* (law) according to Hosea 4:6 (Wolff, 1974), which is represented as regulatory 'policy' in this paper.

Methods

A random sampling of 30 opinions of Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) of major oil companies such as Shell, Chevron, TotalFina/Elf, and Saipem/Agip, alongside few oil-servicing companies, located across the affected communities of the three

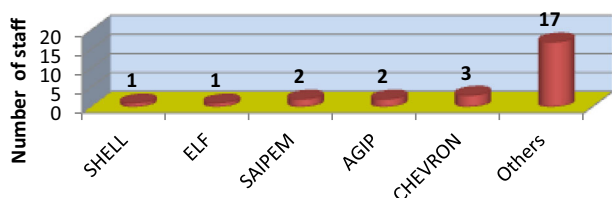


Fig. 1 The number of surveyed Multinationals in Rivers State Nigeria.
Demographic information of multinationals in Rivers State.

Senatorial Districts of Rivers State, served as the sample of participants of the study. The Community Liaison Officers were purposively selected because of their wealth of knowledge in the activities of the oil firms. Moreover, the selection across the three senatorial districts was to ensure fair representation of the oil companies as evident on Fig. 1 and Table 1. Of the six major oil exploration and exploitation companies, the research covered four of them. On Fig. 1, Saipem is separated from Agip although they have merged. The other 17 are the oil-servicing companies. This shows representation of the companies bringing all to 26 companies. Regarding the length of stay of these companies in Rivers State, 18 (69.2%) of these companies (exploration, exploitation and servicing companies) have stayed for over 20 years in Rivers State. This suggests that the activities of the oil firms have had long and continuous impact on the communities in which they are located. Thirty (100%) copies of a self-designed close-ended questionnaire were administered to the liaison officers, but only 26 (86.7%) of them returned their copies, which were valid. The data obtained from them were analysed using simple percentage count and regression analysis. The results were descriptively represented on tables and charts.

Data analysis and discussion

Policy violation as evident among oil Exploration/Exploitation and servicing companies. Table 2 shows that 80.8% of the Oil Companies’ Liaison Officers (CLOs) indicated that the activities of their firms incorporated the “knowledge of God,” while 11.5% and 7.7% responses reveal that the oil companies did not consider the “knowledge of God” as necessary for their businesses in the area. The responses of the 11.5% and 7.7% could be informed by the level of mental alertness of the respondents as it relates to their religious thoughts. That is, they could be nominal religious observers who affiliate themselves to a religion but do not understand what their religious teachings entail.

A large number of the respondents (42.3%) indicated that they do not recognise any portion of land as sacred, while only 38.5% indicated otherwise. The majority (42.3%) of the respondents and the 19.2% liaison officers, who were undecided about the issue, suggests the reason for the conflict between some host communities and the companies. Accordingly, Nwaomah (2007) observed that there are certain provisions in CAP 350, prohibiting oil-based activities in certain areas of the human community. Specifically, Section 17 of the Act prohibits oil-based activities in any area held to be sacred. Some Traditional communities have land they regard as sacred, which these companies do not regard as such, as a result, they venture into those lands, conflict ensues and further calamities endanger the environment.

Some of the respondents (26.9%) agreed that the environmental degradation in Rivers State is a result of the curse from God, for exploitation of the land and not necessarily a reaction to pollution, while another 26.9% were not sure. The 53.8% respondents (i.e., the 26.9% who held that the land is cursed and the 26.9% who were undecided) tend to exonerate the managements of their firms from the environmental crisis in

Table 1 The MNC's length of operation in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Companies length of stay in Rivers State	Frequency	%
5-9 years	4	15.4
10-14 years	2	7.7
15-19 years	2	7.7
20 years and above	18	69.2
Total	26	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2012.

Rivers State, thereby affirming Aquinas’ theory of natural law, which succinctly asserts that right participation in the eternal law (i.e., the rational plan by which all creation is ordered) results in goodwill, while any deviation from this order causes disaster and not necessarily a curse from God. However, 46.2% disagreed that the land is cursed by God. They rather believed that the land is reacting to pollution. This 46.2% response illuminates Hayes’ (2002) observation that the theme of reversal of creation (degradation) is tied within Hosea 4:1-3 as a whole, to the violation of environmental regulations and ethical principles.

Majority (73.1%) of the respondents had the knowledge of God, in that they believed that the knowledge about the environment is tied to the *knowledge of God*. In other words, these 73.1% of respondents were aware that the land functions as a moral and spiritual barometer. They knew that the land stood at the junction of the vertical and the horizontal covenant relationships (Wright, 1999), thereby suggesting that ‘the knowledge of God’ (which, from Hosea’s perspective, is obedience), could improve environmental well-being.

The table also reveals that 65.4% of the companies’ CLOs claimed their firms had good relationship with communities outside their host communities while 30.8% claimed otherwise and 3.8% were undecided on the issue. However, the incident that happened in Rivers West Senatorial District on April 2, 2012 in Egita, a host community, and by extension to neighbouring communities reveals the companies’ lack of *chesed* (i.e., mutual relationship) with their host communities. One of these companies aware of the implication and abolition of diversionary drilling operations, damned such prohibition and implication of such operation and embarked on diversionary drilling, which had left the people of its host community and the surrounding ones homeless. Not only that, they were rendered homeless, their drinking water sources were contaminated, fire burned underground, the air was polluted, crop farms were destroyed, some animal species killed, and the forests further damaged (Anon., 2012).

As it relates to prompt execution of community projects by the companies, 53.8% disagreed with the statement “we always execute community projects promptly”, while 38.5% agreed to the statement and 7.7% were not sure whether or not they promptly executed community project. These responses show a kind of inconsistency and disorderliness on the part of the companies and this could affect the possibility of having mutual relationship between any of the companies and its host community.

To further complicate the relational ideals, 88.5% of the respondents agreed to the fact that their companies’ sites are located within the village or town areas where people live. Indeed, this act is against the 1969 Petroleum Act (CAP 350). Lending credence to Nwaomah (2007), certain provisions in CAP 350 prohibited oil-based activities in certain areas. Specifically, Section 17 of the Act prohibits oil-based activities in any area reserved as sacred; any part set apart for use or appropriated or dedicated to public purpose; any part situated within a town, village, market, burial ground or cemetery; any part, which is

Table 2 The MNC's adherence to policy otherwise presented as the 'knowledge of God'.

S/N	Test item	Responses	Frequency (n = 26)	Percentage (%)
1	Our activities as oil firm has nothing to do with God	Disagree	21	80.8
		Undecided	3	11.5
		Agree	2	7.7
2	There is no area of land sacred than the others	Disagree	10	38.5
		Undecided	5	19.2
		Agree	11	42.3
3	The land cannot be cursed by God for being exploited because it is simply reacting to pollution	Disagree	7	26.9
		Undecided	7	26.9
		Agree	12	46.2
4	If the causes of degradation are removed the land will improve even without God	Disagree	19	73.1
		Undecided	0	0
		Agree	7	26.9
5	We have no business with communities outside our host community	Disagree	17	65.4
		Undecided	1	3.8
		Agree	8	30.8
6	We always execute community projects promptly	Disagree	14	53.8
		Undecided	2	7.7
		Agree	10	38.5
7	Some of our sites are situated within the village or town areas	Disagree	2	7.7
		Undecided	1	3.8
		Agree	23	88.5
8	We are sometimes resisted when we operate on private lands	Disagree	3	11.5
		Undecided	3	11.5
		Agree	20	77
9	Some of our host communities have full understanding of their rights	Disagree	5	19.2
		Undecided	2	7.7
		Agree	19	73.1
10	Some oil spillages are as a result of community youth restiveness	Disagree	3	11.5
		Undecided	3	11.5
		Agree	20	77
11	Our activities as a business corporation are not responsible for all the pollution in this area	Disagree	10	38.5
		Undecided	3	11.5
		Agree	13	50.0
12	Shedding of innocent blood and violent acts are not responsible for degradation of the environment, but oil spills are	Disagree	9	34.6
		Undecided	2	7.7
		Agree	15	57.7

within fifty yards of any building, institution, reservoir, dam, public road or railway or which is appropriated for or situated within fifty yards of any rail; any part consisting of private land; any part under cultivation. In fact, the majority (88.5%) affirmative response to location of site shows, in reality, a violation of environmental rules—the “lack of knowledge of God.” This further explains why there is continuous friction between these companies and their host communities over obvious degradation of the environment.

Reason for some kind of chaotic environment in rivers state.

Looking at the responses from Figs. 2 and 3, it is clear that in Fig. 2, the majority (84.6%) agreed that they followed environmental policies as prescribed, while 11.6% disagreed and 3.8% were undecided. In Fig. 3, the majority (69.2%) indicated that their host communities are hostile to them, while 19.2% disagreed and 11.6% were undecided. The foregoing responses point more to the fact that a breach in set principles may have been leading to the experience of chaotic society and the crisis in the physical environment. Figure 4 shows the level to which the multinationals go by dividing and ruling the oil producing communities, as they side-line the chiefs who are expected to be custodians of their environment and liaise instead with the youths. Accordingly, 58% preferred liaising with the youths,

while 34% preferred to liaise with the chiefs and 8% felt at home liaising with both chiefs and youths. The responses from the companies' Community Liaison officers as represented in the chart, raise a concern as to why 58% respondents of these companies, preferred to liaise with the youths instead of the community chiefs who are duly appointed to bridge the gap between the community and external forces.

The observation made by Alamieyeseigha (2005) gives a clue as to why the companies chose to liaise with the youth. He observed that there has been a long standing neglect of the Niger Delta by successive governments at all levels; federal, state and local government; and that there has been the unwholesome activities of oil and gas companies, which have employed the option of divide and conquer, to deny the host communities of growth and development. He continues that these companies identify key opinion leaders (chiefs) in their host communities, and use them against the rest of the community, resulting in the emergence of rival groups. In other words, 58% of companies operate in areas where the chiefs are in charge, while 34% operate in areas where the youths are in charge, and the 8% have been surviving with both conditions (liaising with chiefs and youths). The foregoing explains the varied responses of the respondents. In essence, their responses suggest that there is lack of *Chesed's* mutual community responsibility in their communities.

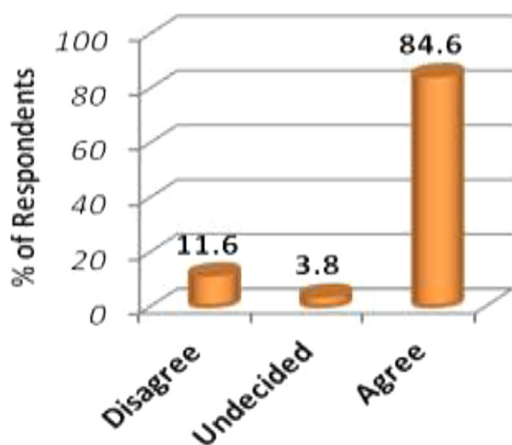


Fig. 2 A test on whether or not the Multinationals in Rivers State Nigeria obeyed environmental policies.

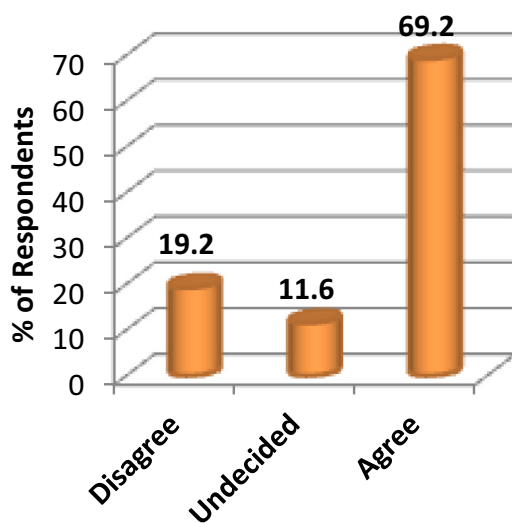
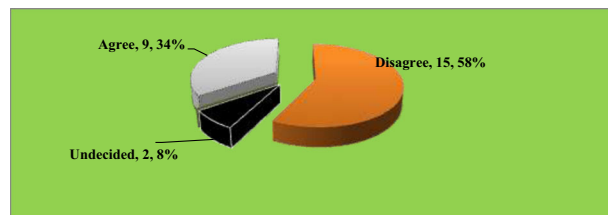


Fig. 3 How the companies perceived the Host community as hostile? Respondents who indicated that Host community is somewhat hostile.

Table 2 reveals that the oil firms were resisted by landlords as 77% of the respondents agreed that they were sometimes resisted when they operate on private lands. In the first place, these companies have breached a provision in CAP 350, which prohibits oil-based activities on private lands (Nwaomah, 2007). It, therefore, follows, as Walter (1976) observed that the “lack of knowledge of God’ is the people’s “...violation of law and ethical principles” (standards that promote life). We can, therefore, submit that the failure to abide by “Natural Laws” (which deals with proper ways of living in a given community) gives birth to proliferation of crimes in the society. In other words, although the Rivers State residents have their contributions to degrading the environment, the oil companies are not in any way exonerated, especially as their breach on existing standards of living had affected both the human and natural environments in the state. The paired 11.5% who disagreed and were undecided respectively regarding the statement “we are sometimes resisted when we operate on private lands,” may not be sincere because the statement does not suggest all times. At least, they may have been resisted at some point in time but are being economical with the truth.



Source: Field Survey, 2012

Fig. 4 The respondents' preference on who to liaise with in the Host Community. Responses on the question - It is better to liaise with the community chiefs than liaising with the youths.

Responding to the statement on the people’s awareness of their rights, 73.1% agreed that the communities have full understanding of their rights while 19.2% disagreed and 7.7% were undecided over the matter. This also could be a source of friction especially as shown in the response of 88.5% that agreed that they have violated the rights of the residents of the communities their sites are located within. Any given community with a clear understanding of their rights will always fight for such rights, hence, we see the height of tension resulting in vandalism of pipelines and destruction of lives and property by the residents (especially the youths) of such communities. The forgoing further suggests that the environmental situation of Rivers State could be blamed on the oil companies.

Table 2 also shows that majority (77%) of the companies’ response agreed that although oil spillages may be blamed on the oil companies, their host community youths were also culpable for oil spillage as they vandalised oil pipes. Furthermore, the table reveals that 50% of the respondents agreed that they have a part in degrading the environment of Rivers State, while 38.5% and 11.5% respectively disagreed and were undecided. Finally, 57.7% respondents indicated that oil spills are responsible for the environmental degradation in Rivers State, while 34.6% agreed that apart from oil spills, shedding of innocent blood has indeed affected their environment. The 38.5% who held that their activities as business corporations are responsible for all the pollution in Rivers State are very realistic. However, they missed the inclusion of the other elements of the society, like the youths who vandalise the pipelines, as contributors to the problem. This is in line with the observations made by Anderson (1986); Rasmussen (2000); and Spalling (2001), that environmental degradation has links with modern industrialisation and poverty. Also, Onuorah (2006), Nwaomah (2007), and Feinberg (1984) associate environmental degradation with oil exploitation and exploration but not with “Lack of Knowledge of God” as in Hos. 4:1–3, which is the focus of this work. We, therefore, submit that the oil-related environmental pollution and poverty in Rivers State is caused by “lack of knowledge of God” (ignoring life-supporting principles).

Summary of findings. Dysfunctional community relationships in Rivers State, underlined by pipeline vandalism, oil spillage, and oil theft, typify breaches of theistic and other environmental regulations with ecological consequences. These were attested to by 88.5% of the CLOs of the Companies. Equally, community youths engaged in pipeline vandalism while oil companies engaged in oil spillage and dumping of high level hydrocarbon pollutants on the ground, thereby preventing the growth of vegetation, animal and human populations. All these constitute a breach of theistic policy. These violations of environmental policies were affirmed by 73.1% of the CLOs.

In addition, the *F*-test from the regression analysis shows that the value of *F*-calculated (6.633) is greater than

F-tabulated (3.86) taking cognizant of the *P*-value of 0.01, which is lesser than 0.05 level of probability. Thus, it confirms the fact that there is a significant relationship between contravention of law and ethical principles, and environmental degradation in Rivers State. Furthermore, the value of coefficient of correlation (*r*) is 0.126. This further confirms that there is a positive relationship between violation of environmental policies (X) and environmental degradation (Y) in Rivers State, of Nigeria. In other words, this positive relationship means that the prevalence of the violation of environmental policies and ethical principles in Rivers State leads to an increase in environmental degradation.

Conclusion

Torah (environmental policy) as well as ethical principles remains germane in the preservation and promotion of life in any given society. Therefore, oil syphoning in the form of “bunkering,” destructive act of gas flaring, situating of operation sites of oil companies within the village, town or residential areas, as discovered in the findings of this study, are all contraventions of environmental law and ethical principles (*Torah*). Ignoring the theistic requirements for the preservation and promotion of life in Rivers State as exemplified in the vices mentioned earlier, consist of contravention of theistic and associated environmental regulations, as well as ethical principles, and thus, have grave environmental consequences. Therefore, the Rivers State ecosystems have largely been endangered due to the ill disposition toward the environmental regulations by the multinational companies in the State. More so, environmental pollution resulting from oil exploration and exploitation by oil companies could only be relevant to the extent by which the Rivers State people assume full custody of their environment. Hence, it could be wrong to claim ignorance of the economically induced environmental degradation in Rivers State. Therefore, it is within the powers of the people to acknowledge, apply, and enforce theistic and related environmental policies, for protecting their environment and to safeguard their continual existence.

Recommendations. Apart from the promulgations of environmental laws and policies, there should be valuation of modalities for the enforcements of life-supporting principles, as negligence on the part of government, and contraventions on the part of the Rivers State residents, as well as on the part of the Oil Companies, could cause more harm to the Rivers State environment.

Also, the Government (National, State and Local) should sincerely come up with promulgations that would enhance mutual relationship between the oil companies and the residents in Rivers State. If the government would, through their promulgations, make the Rivers State as well as other oil producing States’ indigenes feel a sense of belonging, restiveness could be seriously minimised.

In addition, avenues should be created for awareness, possibly through regular campaigns on social media platforms, on pulpits and in schools, on the effect of contributory negligence, highlighting the fact that the prevalence of the *lack of knowledge of God* (that is, policy violation) in a given society, results in increase in environmental damage and sufferings.

Data availability

No new data were created during the study.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced their writing this paper. Therefore, they declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not sought for, in this research due to the 'exemption' clause by *National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria* (NHREC), which suffices for this kind of research. Although this is not a clinical research, privacy and confidentiality of respondents was however, maintained in line with the principle of confidentiality. The *National Health Research Ethics Committee* (NHREC) of Nigeria (2007) stipulates in *Section B* of NHREC document, that research involving the use of survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behaviour with the anonymity of the human participants maintained, is exempted from ethical approval.

Informed consent

This research was carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines. Participants were made to understand the academic purpose of the research, and they willingly and voluntarily granted the needed information regarding the study. All participants (i.e., Companies' Community Liaison Officers) granted needed information without being coerced or compelled. These Companies' CLOs were all independent individuals.

Additional information

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