

## **Converging Stresses: Ecology, Power and Conflict in West Africa's Oil-Rich Context**

Godwin Onuoha<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther University, Graduate School Society and Culture in Motion (SCM), Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

godwin.onuoha@scm.uni-halle.de

Since the late 1990s, West Africa's Gulf of Guinea has emerged as a critical energy repository and a major frontier of global oil extraction. Its importance has been intensified by the resource boom on the continent, the rise of new consumers globally (India and China) and the advent of new oil states which have joined the ranks of prominent oil ones like Nigeria, Angola, Cameroon, Gabon and Congo Brazzaville. While the political economy of oil in the Gulf of Guinea presents some of the most visible forms of environmental degradation, (mis)governance, insecurity, political instability and conflict on the continent, it does not suggest that new boom states will necessarily replicate the experiences of established ones or emulate their approach. But drawing on the experience of Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and leading oil producer, this paper provides critical lessons for emerging oil states as they begin to experience novel forms of integration into global networks of oil production which are bound to spawn new environmental, political and social challenges.

This paper is premised on the notion that the world will remain 'hooked' on oil for decades to come. At the heart of the paper is the examination of the linkages between globalised oil extraction and environmental rights/security in a region that is gradually hitting the limits of oil extraction environmentally, politically and socially. The entrenchment of the region into global networks of oil production is bound to have far-reaching implications on struggles around resource extraction and distribution, how the environment is regulated and accounted for by structures of environmental governance globally, and on the balance of power between local forces and the state-global oil capital alliance. The geo-political implications of these developments for West Africa stem from its centrality to the global extractive regime, capitalist interests and national security of oil producing states in the sub-region. As the extractive regime intensifies the production and extraction of oil in the region, more pressure is brought to bear on the oil-rich environment leading to further stress, pollution and degradation. Part of the focus of this paper is to reflect on the causes of contemporary oil-induced environmental conflict, the opposition mounted by indigenous communities and movements who seek to transform power relations, the 'commodification' of the environment by an internationalist politics of neo-liberalism and what this portends for the region in a post-Copenhagen-Cancun world.