

The Quest for Environmental Justice in Nigeria's Oil Region: What Ramifications for West Africa's Emerging Oil States?

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The paper provides a comparative overview of the on-going quest for environmental justice in the oil-rich, but under-developed Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and its ramifications for the emerging oil producing states in West Africa. While the recent discovery of oil in the following West African countries in the last decade: Ghana, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome and Principe, have brought a sense of euphoria linked to an imminent oil boom, the struggles for environmental justice which have raged for three decades in West Africa's oil producing giant: Nigeria continue to cast a long shadow of doubt over the expected future of oil-fuelled prosperity for all in the new oil states. The struggle for environmental justice in Nigeria's oil-producing region that has turned out to be rather intractable has been fuelled by a deep sense of alienation and grievance by those whose lands, waters and livelihoods have been blighted by oil production and pollution, contributing to social tensions and conflict, partly driven by the 'paradox of plenty'. This paper explores four fundamental questions in comparative perspective: What are the driving factors/forces in the quest for environmental justice in Nigeria, are there early signs that similar factors/forces are present in the new oil states, is there a risk or possibility that factors/forces can 'migrate' to the new oil states from Nigeria, and finally what can the new oil states learn from the Nigerian situation, as a step towards promoting environmental justice in ways that can enable them avoid the path of tension, conflict and the paradox of plenty?