

## Pipeline Hell Fires

Photo credit: Leadership.ng

### Policy Recommendations

1. Creation of enabling environment for small scale business as means of reducing mass poverty and preventing fuel scooping
2. Illegal trading of petroleum products should be stopped and offenders prosecuted.
3. Security intelligence should be used in gathering information on syndicates and their activities.
4. Pipelines and other oil facilities should be protected and monitored using modern technology in addition to man-guarding
5. The media should be used in creating awareness and reporting incidences of leaking pipelines.

**Nextier SPD Policy Weekly** provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of **Nextier SPD**.

For further discussion of pragmatic implementation of the recommendations, please contact

[www.nextierspd.com](http://www.nextierspd.com)  
[info@nextierspd.com](mailto:info@nextierspd.com)  
 +234 701 002 7301

Two communities in Osisioma Ngwa Local Government Area in Abia State were on October 12,2018, ravaged by pipeline explosion inferno. The persons who died immediately and later in hospitals as a result of the petroleum accident, were over 150, many of whom were scooping fuel from burst pipelines. Others had severe burns, while property worth millions of Naira was destroyed. Pipeline fire disasters are not new in Nigeria, like the catastrophic occurrence in Jesse in Delta State in 1998 which left over 1000 persons dead. Nigeria is still ravaged by incessant pipeline explosions with dire consequences to lives, livelihoods, investment and national image. Following the Abia State's incident, this edition of Nextier SPD Weekly, analyses the issue and provides recommendations to reverse the ugly trend.

As a rentier economy, oil is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. The oil-producing Niger Delta region is home to over 600 oilfields, 5,284 oil wells, ten export terminals, 275 flow stations. From the region's take-off point, over 7,000 kilometers of pipelines crisscross the country transporting highly inflammable contents to terminals, stations and depots. Most of these pipelines were laid in the 1960s and 1970s and have become rusty for lack of proper maintenance. Indeed, rusty petroleum pipelines have been blamed for a number of fire incidences. Also, technical faults and equipment failures have been rampant. Apart from industry-related causes, vandalism of active pipelines for oil theft has also been blamed. Actually, some Niger Delta insurgent groups deployed sabotage against the Nigerian state and oil companies prior to 2009, with the aim of seeking redress for the socioeconomic neglect and environmental damage of their homeland by oil production.

There are several efforts aimed at arresting the phenomena of oil spill, pipeline vandalism and their concomitant tragic fire outbreaks. These include private security arrangements such as the use of private security guards and community vigilante groups to complement government security agencies such as National Security and Civil Defence Corps in patrolling and protecting

the pipelines. Other efforts is the establishment of the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency in 2006. Sadly, these efforts have not only failed to guarantee protection but some have even become counter-productive because of security agents' collusion with criminals and as well as other corruption practices.

Some measures are to be adopted to protect critical pipeline infrastructures, investments, livelihoods and human lives:

1. Governments at all levels need to ameliorate the incidence of mass poverty by creating the enabling environment for small scale businesses. This will create sources of livelihood for the people and may prevent them from engaging in fuel scooping from leaky pipelines.
2. Laws prohibiting the use of black markets which is the major sales outlet for scooped fuel should be implemented, and people involved in this nefarious business should be prosecuted.
3. Authorities in charge should deploy intelligence gathering in arresting the criminals who perpetrate pipelines sabotage for their own pecuniary gains thereby exposing the people and environment to dangers.
4. Modern technology should be used in monitoring and protecting pipelines. Most oil-producing states such as Norway, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela deploy modern technology such as super cameras and drones to quickly detect leakages and breached locations in their pipeline network. Nigeria's pipeline network is too vast and complex to be physically patrolled by the few available security agents alone.
5. Stakeholders in the oil industry need to partner with the media in ensuring prompt reportage of compromised pipelines and in educating the people of the danger of fuel scooping. The sensitization /awareness campaigns should be carried out in all communities crisscrossed by pipelines and also in local languages and pidgin.

In conclusion, NOSDRA and other government monitoring agencies should be alive to their responsibilities. If these measures are effectively implemented, the incessant incidence of pipeline fire disasters would be abated drastically.