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## Oloibiri: Lessons from the Lifecycle of a Single-Industry Town in Nigeria

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## **Oloibiri: Lessons from the Lifecycle Of a Single-Industry Town in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the socio-economic aftermath of the oil industry's closure in the town of Oloibiri to derive key lessons for similar towns. Central to the research is the question: What lessons can be learned from Oloibiri's experience with resource development and economic transformation? The methodology combines primary and secondary data, including historical contextualization and interviews, to explore the town's transition after the oil industry's exit. The findings reveal economic and social impacts, including job loss, environmental degradation, and forced migration. These challenges have led to a decline in population and living standards, and the disruption of traditional occupations and small businesses. The study uncovers an interplay of factors, including government policies, mismanagement, and global market shifts, contributing to Oloibiri's current state of condition and poverty. The town's struggles with lack of adequate infrastructure, pollution, and limited employment opportunities highlight the immediate need for systemic change. By documenting Oloibiri's journey, the research underscores key lessons for managing the socio-economic transitions of single-industry towns, emphasizing the importance of diversification and sustainable development. Further research is encouraged on peripheral resource-based communities in Nigeria to inform strategies for their resilience and growth.

**Keywords:** Oloibiri, resource-based community, economic transition, environmental degradation, socio-economic impact, sustainable development

## **Oloibiri : leçons du cycle de vie d'une ville mono-industrielle au Nigeria**

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### **Résumé**

Cette étude examine les conséquences socio-économiques de la fermeture de l'industrie pétrolière dans la ville d'Oloibiri afin d'en tirer des leçons clés pour des villes similaires. La question centrale de la recherche est la suivante : quelles leçons peut-on tirer de l'expérience d'Oloibiri en matière de développement des ressources et de transformation économique? La méthodologie combine des données primaires et secondaires, y compris une contextualisation historique et des entretiens, pour explorer la transition de la ville après que l'industrie pétrolière a cessé ses activités. Les résultats révèlent des impacts économiques et sociaux, notamment la perte d'emplois, la dégradation de l'environnement et la migration forcée. Ces défis ont entraîné une baisse de la population et du niveau de vie, ainsi que la perturbation des métiers traditionnels et des petites entreprises. L'étude révèle une interaction de facteurs, notamment les politiques gouvernementales, la mauvaise gestion et les changements du marché mondial, qui contribuent à l'état actuel de condition et de pauvreté d'Oloibiri. Les difficultés de la ville face au manque d'infrastructures adéquates, à la pollution et aux opportunités d'emploi limitées mettent en évidence la nécessité immédiate d'un changement systémique. En documentant le parcours d'Oloibiri, la recherche souligne les enseignements clés pour la gestion des transitions socio-économiques des villes mono-industrielles, en soulignant l'importance de la diversification et du développement durable. Des recherches plus approfondies sont encouragées sur les communautés périphériques basées sur les ressources au Nigeria afin d'éclairer les stratégies visant leur résilience et leur croissance.

**Mots-clés** : Oloibiri, communauté basée sur les ressources, transition économique, dégradation de l'environnement, impact socio-économique, développement durable

## **1.0 Introduction**

The town of Oloibiri, located in Nigeria, serves as a case study of the socio-economic consequences that can arise in a resource-based community (RBC) following the decline of a single industry, specifically oil. The situation in Oloibiri highlights the interplay of economic dependency, environmental concerns, and the challenges that emerge following an industry's decline. This pattern is not unique to Oloibiri but is also evident in RBCs globally, highlighting the importance of understanding and managing such transitions. The primary aim of this study is to explore and answer a pivotal question: What lessons can other resource towns learn from Oloibiri's experience with resource development and economic transformation?

This research investigates the aftermath of the oil industry's closure, examining its broad impact on Oloibiri's economic stability, demographic trends, environmental integrity, and social fabric. It also considers the lived experiences and shared history of the community members. These insights are vital for academic discourse, policy formulation, and community development strategies, particularly in the global south. The study employs a combination of primary and secondary sources, incorporating historical contextualization, structured interviews that capture personal narratives, and case studies that reflect the communal journey. This multifaceted approach, framed within contemporary theories of economic development and environmental sustainability, provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities in Oloibiri's transition. It offers a lens to analyze and comprehend the community's shared experiences and adaptive strategies.

The structure of the paper is outlined as follows: following this introduction, the subsequent section delineates the research questions and methodology. This section sets the stage for the exploration of Oloibiri, detailing its historical engagement with the oil industry and the origins of its current challenges. Following this, a literature review places the study within the broader context of global South scholarship, paving the way for a discussion that engages with and assesses existing academic contributions. The findings are then presented, shedding light on the socio-economic impacts in Oloibiri, intertwined with lessons that can be extrapolated to similar communities in the Global South. The paper concludes with a discussion on policy implications and development strategies, ultimately summarizing the study's key insights.

## **2.0 Research Questions and Methodology**

This study aims to enrich the literature on RBCs, with a specific focus on the town of Oloibiri, Nigeria. The central research question, 'What lessons can other resource towns learn from Oloibiri's resource development and subsequent economic shift?', seeks to uncover insights in areas such as economic resilience, environmental stewardship, policy formulation, and community development. These aspects are significant for understanding the broader implications of resource dependency and economic transitions in RBCs. The research question is framed within the context of changing global trends in resource management, which include shifts in government policies, resource depletion, and technological advancements, as highlighted by Kadafa (2012), Jike (2004), and Armitage (2005), and further examined by Chapin et al. (2009), Southcott (2006), and High (2018). The research addresses a notable gap in literature specific to Nigerian RBCs and contributes to the global discourse on sustainable development and adaptive strategies for communities facing similar challenges, building on the foundations laid by Beaulieu (2013), High (2018), Kadafa (2012), Jike (2004), Teitelbaum et al. (2019), and Smith et al. (2001).

The research was conducted using a combination of primary and secondary data sources to have a better understanding of the situation in the Niger Delta, specifically focusing on the town of Oloibiri in the Ogbia local government area of Bayelsa State. Primary data were collected through surveys, interviews, and direct observations, providing firsthand insights into the current condition of the community and its residents. For secondary data, an extensive review and analysis were conducted on a range of materials to provide historical context and depth. This included government reports, books, articles, documentaries, academic journals, newspapers (primarily *THISDAY*), and official documents issued from Shell and Amnesty International. The focus on Shell is essential due to its role as the first company to discover oil in Oloibiri and the Niger Delta. Shell owns and operates 50% of the oil wells in the Niger Delta region and has been operational for over five decades (Shell, 2009; Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, 2014). Amnesty International is an internationally recognized nongovernmental organization that has produced several reports on Niger Delta issues over the past two decades. *THISDAY* Newspaper is a widely distributed national newspaper in Nigeria and provides a local perspective with its extensive coverage of issues in the Niger Delta region.

The choice of Oloibiri as the focal point for this study is strategic, considering its historical significance in oil exploration and its central role in the socio-economic and environmental narrative of the Niger Delta. This historical perspective is crucial for understanding the community's evolution and is supported by the scholarly works of Beaulieu (2013), Elena et al. (2010), Timothy (2012), Zald (1993), and Ventresca and Mohr (2017).

A demographic breakdown of interview participants was designed to ensure that the research captured a representative and diverse set of perspectives. The participant pool spanned various age groups, including young adults (18–35 years old) to capture the adaptation of newer entrants into the workforce, middle-aged adults (36–55 years old) to understand mid-career adjustments and family dynamics, and seniors (56 years and older) for their long-term historical understandings into the community's economic cycles. The occupational background of participants varied significantly; it included former industry workers directly affected by the closures, professionals from the service sector such as educators and healthcare workers to gauge secondary economic impacts, and community leaders who offered insights into strategic responses to economic challenges (see Table 1).

To ensure demographic diversity within the study's sample, the recruitment strategy combined purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was employed to intentionally select individuals who met specific demographic criteria essential to the study's objectives, ensuring a diverse and relevant initial participant base. Snowball sampling was then used to expand this base, enabling access to additional participants from often underrepresented or hard-to-access groups, thereby enhancing the study's overall demographic coverage as discussed by Neuman and Robson (2014). However, this method introduces potential biases: purposive sampling may not completely represent the broader population due to the subjective selection of participants, while snowball sampling can perpetuate these biases by potentially limiting the pool to similar or interconnected individuals. Acknowledging this limitation, efforts were made to reach a varied sample by initiating contacts from multiple and diverse nodes within the community, thereby reducing the potential for homogeneity and bias in the responses gathered.

Table 1: *Demographic and Occupational Distribution of Interview Participants*

Age group (years)	Number	Specific roles	Details
18–35	6	Student, entrepreneurs, unemployed	Engaged in current economic activities, adapting to new economic realities
36–55	7	Business owners, unemployed, community leaders, entrepreneurs, healthcare workers	Experienced the transition period of the oil industry, mid-career adjustments
≥ 56	7	Former oil industry workers, entrepreneurs, community leaders, unemployed	Hold historical insights and personal experiences from the oil industry's active years

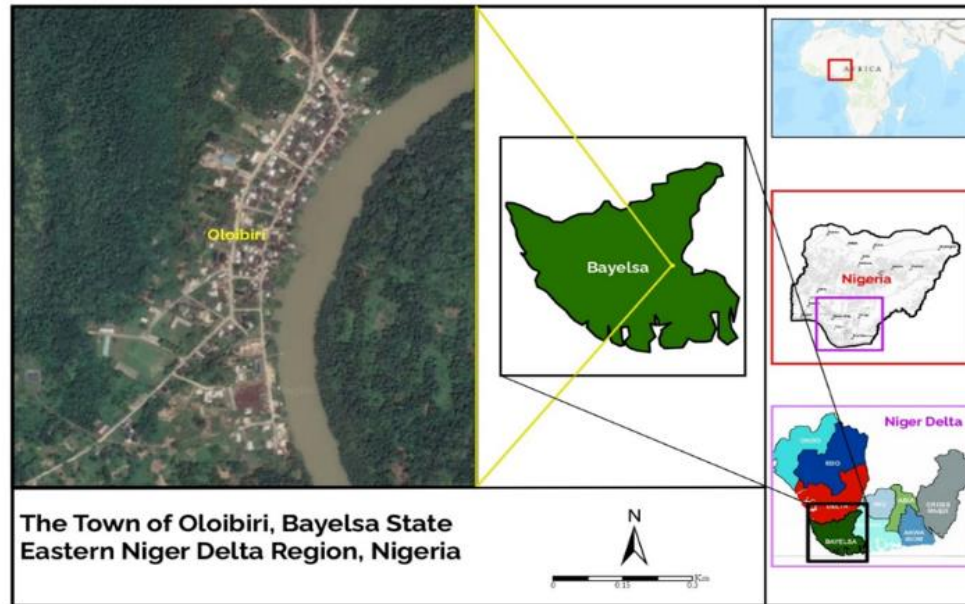
The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format as recommended by Berg (2004). The interviews lasted between 35 to 60 minutes. Data from interviews were coded and transcribed using ATLAS.ti software, facilitating a systematic analysis to identify themes and patterns in the qualitative data. For the quantitative aspect, particularly regarding demographic changes in Oloibiri, census data from both Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial periods were examined. However, specific census data for the town of Oloibiri was not available. To compensate for this lack of comprehensive census information, descriptions and estimated figures provided by interview participants were utilized to depict Oloibiri's population. Interviews were conducted in English and pidgin, ensuring inclusivity and depth in participant responses, thereby enhancing the richness of the data.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participants were provided with information about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their personal identifiers were removed during data analysis and reporting. All data collected were securely stored on the researcher's computer.

### 3.0 Oloibiri and the Genesis of an Industry

The town of Oloibiri was founded by Olei in the 15th century and has long been a melting pot, inhabited by people of diverse origins. Olei, originally from Benin, first established Nembe, a small town known for its involvement in the slave trade. He later founded the town of Oloibiri within present day Bayelsa State, Niger Delta, Nigeria, and his vassals set up settlements in what is now known as Ogbia (Nwajiaku, 2005). Reflecting on this history, Participant 007, an elder from Oloibiri, shared, “the stories of Olei and his journeys have been passed down through generations. They remind us of our diverse roots and the rich tapestry of cultures that shaped the town of Oloibiri.” The town of Oloibiri occupied a small area, typical of the many scattered, rural settlements throughout the Niger delta. The area is characterized by its mangrove forest and an intricate network of rivers and creeks essential for local transportation and livelihoods (see Figure 1). Participant 018, an elderly resident, recalls, “Oloibiri was once a tapestry of green and blue, a testament to nature's gifts,” reflecting on the town's natural beauty.

Figure 1. Location map of the Town of Oloibiri.



Source: Author, 2024

In its pre-oil era, the population was relatively small, likely numbering in the hundreds and below a thousand. The residents primarily belonged to local ethnic groups such as the Ijaw. The economy heavily relied on agriculture, fishing, and forestry, leveraging the area's rich natural resources to create a sustainable system (Emah & Adebayo, 2022; Okotie, 2018). Participant 015, a historian from the local community, noted, “our ancestors understood the land. For them, agriculture was more than a job; it was part of our culture and identity.” Residents of Ogbia, including those in the town of Oloibiri, developed important trade relationships with European traders in the Niger Delta, especially through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the palm oil trade (Doust & Omatsola, 1989). Participant 004, a descendant of a trading family, shares, “there are stories in my family about the bartering days when we exchanged yams and plantains for fish with Nembe.” During this period, the expansion of palm products beyond domestic consumption was encouraged by the slave trade, colonial administration, and missionary culture (Okotie, 2018). Participant 018 adds, “being geographically and culturally close to Nembe, the town of Oloibiri was like a sibling, learning and growing alongside it.” Fishing and agriculture, particularly the production of oil palm, was a cornerstone of their subsistence and export economy.

Socially and culturally, Oloibiri exhibited the characteristics of a close-knit rural community. The social structure was tightly woven with strong familial ties and communal practices that governed land use, resource management, and everyday interactions. Cultural and social life was rich with festivals and events linked to the agricultural and fishing cycles, reflecting the community's deep connection to their natural surroundings. Participant 003, a long-time resident, reflects, “we grew up knowing everyone in our community, sharing in each other's joys and sorrows. Our traditions were the soul of Oloibiri.” Infrastructure in Oloibiri before the oil era was minimal, reflecting the general state of rural Nigerian communities at the time. There was little to no modern amenities such as electricity, paved roads, or

medical facilities. Life in Oloibiri was predominantly governed by natural and seasonal cycles, with whatever infrastructure present being primarily aimed at supporting the agricultural and fishing needs of the community. Interaction with external commercial interests or the colonial government was also minimal until the mid-20th century.

While the community of Oloibiri had thrived on its traditional and communal practices, largely undisturbed by external influences for most of its history, a significant shift was on the horizon. This change was linked to the nation's pursuit of economic growth and set in motion by broader geopolitical events. After the First World War, the Nigerian Bitumen Corporation, a German entity, initiated oil exploration after discovering seepages in Araromi, now part of Ondo State (Ipingbemi, 2009). The British colonial administration supported these efforts through the Mineral Oils Ordinance of 1914, aiming to regulate and capitalize on the region's oil potential (Ipingbemi, 2009; Steyn, 2009). However, progress was delayed by the Second World War, stalling significant exploration activities until the late 1930s (Genova & Falola, 2003; Ipingbemi, 2009). Post-Second World War, Shell D'Arcy was granted an oil exploration license, marking a renewed push for oil exploration along Nigeria's coast. Despite earlier interruptions, Shell D'Arcy's efforts culminated in the discovery of commercial oil reserves in Oloibiri in 1956 (see Figure 2), a pivotal moment that brought economic benefits to the locals and marked a significant chapter in Nigeria's history (Anifowose, 2008; Kadafa, 2012; Onuoha, 2008).

As recounted by Oyadongha and Idio (2016), the early days of oil exploration were fraught with challenges that transcended technical hurdles. When Shell officials initially attempted to sink their equipment into the *terra firma* of Oloibiri Oil Well 1, the earth resisted their efforts, posing an unexpected conundrum that halted their progress. This conflict between human ingenuity and the natural resistance of the terrain led to an innovative solution that was deeply influenced by the cultural ethos of Oloibiri. The oracle, a venerated figure in local tradition, was consulted, and it was divulged that the displeasure of the gods was the source of the impediment. In an act that harmonized modern enterprise with ancestral customs, Shell officials extended modest offerings to appease these deities. This gesture of respect for the local customs marked a turning point, as the once unyielding ground now permitted the successful operation of the drilling equipment. With the resolution of this cultural impasse, the activity at the creek that connected Oloibiri to the vast Atlantic increased, transforming into a major hub of commerce and industry. Residents of Oloibiri at the time expressed a blend of hope and anticipation for the changes. Participant 007 recalled, "we welcomed them, believing it would bring growth and jobs." Participant 018 echoed this sentiment, "there was hope in the air, a sense of impending prosperity."

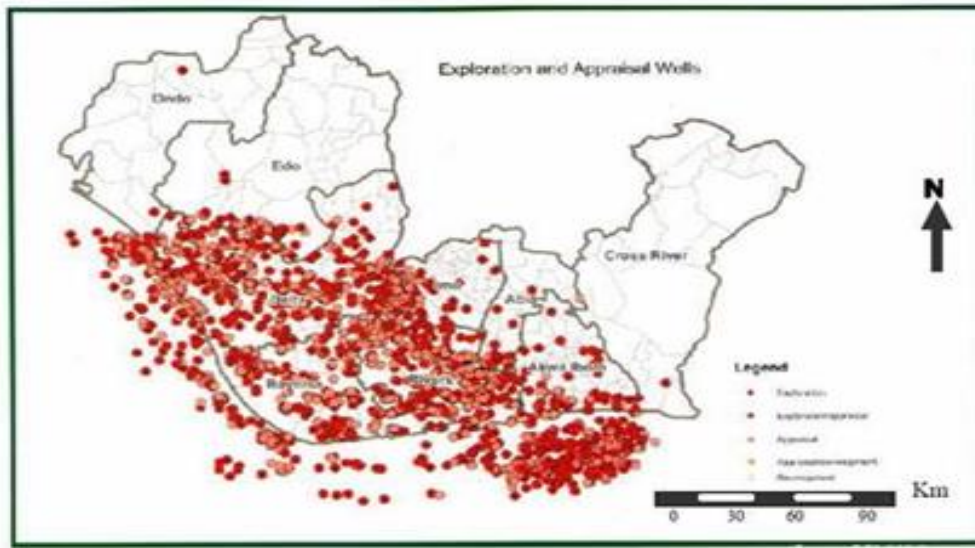
*Figure 2:* The informational sign at Oloibiri Oil Well 1 in Ogbia LGA, and the actual Oloibiri Oil Well 1 equipment, now abandoned and overgrown with vegetation. (Willi, 2023).



*Source:* Willi, 2023; Kwaifa, 2019

The discovery of oil in Oloibiri marked the beginning of Nigeria's oil industry and ushered in a new era of wealth and economic activity. The immediate benefits included infrastructure development, road construction, and increased employment opportunities, as Shell established operations in the area (Anifowose, 2008; Chete et al., 2014; Ipingbemi, 2009; Kadafa, 2012; Okonkwo & Madueke, 2016; Onuoha, 2008; Steyn, 2009). Participant 003 reflected on the immediate changes in the landscape: “the arrival of Shell changed everything around here. We saw roads being built where there were none.” By late 1957, oil production was in full swing, leading to the first European shipment in 1958 (Graham & Ovadia, 2019; Okonmah, 1997). The licensing of The Nigerian Gulf Oil Company, a subsidiary of Gulf Oil Corporation of America in 1961 alongside other international oil companies, such as Mobile Oil, Tenneco Inc., Texaco, Occidental, Azienda Generale Italiana Petrol, and Safrap (which later became Elf) further expanded the industry (Achunike, 2020; Atsegbua 2002) (see Figure 3). To further illustrate the scale of this transformation, Participant 019 reminisced, “back then, this place was called ‘Bioforoama’, nicknamed ‘Eastern Congo’, due to its active social environment. At that time, all the ships of Shell workers used to anchor in Oloibiri. People from far and near always converged here,” depicting the social dynamism and high activity level that defined the era. This influx of activity improved local income levels and stimulated growth in service-oriented businesses catering to the increasing population and their needs (Uzonwanne, 2015).

Figure 3: Niger Delta showing the distribution of onshore and offshore fields.



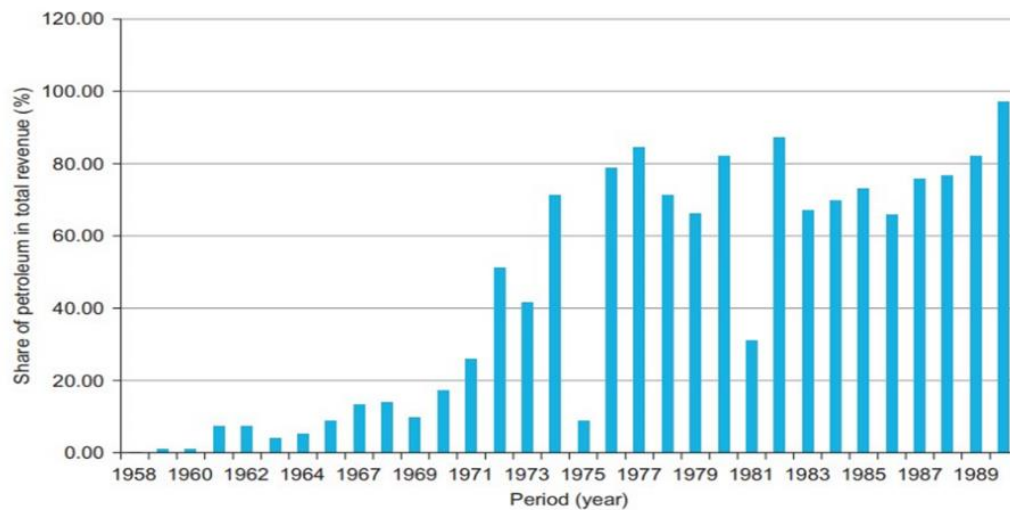
Source: Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006)

Building on the immediate economic surge, the community's lifestyle and expectations underwent significant changes. Participant 010 shared, "I remember how our community became lively, with new faces and businesses emerging", capturing the economic activity that characterized this era. The development of local infrastructure catered for the needs of the oil industry and improved the living standards of the residents. Participant 013 noted, "my father works long hours with the company, and we get good money when the company pays him. So, we do not complain about him not spending time with us," highlighting the economic benefits alongside the personal sacrifices made by families. Participant 16 echoed this sentiment, "it felt like a new era of prosperity was beginning for all of us." Adding to this sense of optimism, Participant 007, an elder who experienced the boom recounted, "the town was alive, day and night; we believed we were on the brink of something great." These testimonies reflect the residents' high hopes for enhanced healthcare, education, and further infrastructure developments, underscoring the transformative impact of the newfound oil wealth on Oloibiri's transition from a quiet fishing village to a dynamic economic hub.

Before the discovery of oil transformed its economy, Nigeria was primarily an agricultural nation and was globally recognized for its exportation of cash crops like (a) rubber from Delta State; (b) groundnuts, hides, and skins from the north; (c) cocoa and coffee from the west; and (d) palm oil and kernels from the east (Okotie, 2018). In the 1960s, agriculture employed about 30% of the population and contributed over 80% to export earnings, 65% to the GDP, and about 50% to government revenue (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2010; National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). However, the discovery of oil marked a significant shift. By the end of the Biafra War in the late 1960s, Nigeria had emerged as a major oil producer (Uwakonye et al., 2006). The oil boom of the 1970s, driven by rising global oil prices solidified Nigeria as the wealthiest nation in Africa and also increased the contribution of oil to the national GDP and government budget (see Figure 4) (Enyia, 1991; Okotie, 2018).

This economic transformation deepened Nigeria's dependence on oil, with revenues from oil increasing from 10% of GDP in the 1960s to 30% in the 1980s (see Figure 4; Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, 1992). Currently, oil significantly dominates Nigeria's economy, accounting for more than 90% of its GDP, over 90% of foreign exchange earnings, and 80% of federal government revenue (Anaeto et al., 2023; Odularu, 2008). Additionally, Nigeria's considerable oil wealth expanded its geopolitical influence, leading to its membership in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) as the 11th member on July 12, 1971 (News Agency of Nigeria, 2021).

Figure 4: Contribution of petroleum to Nigeria's total revenue (1958–1989).



Source: Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, 1992.

The methods of oil extraction in the Niger Delta prior to and during the late 1960s contributed significantly to the Nigerian Civil War (6 July 1967–15 January 1970). This conflict impacted the oil industry in the region. In the wake of the war, the government enacted several significant legislative acts, reshaping the control over oil resources. Notably, these included the Oil in Navigable Waters Act of 1968, the Petroleum Act/Decree of 1969, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Decree of 1979, and the Land Use Act of 1978. These decrees centralized the control of oil resources with the federal government, as detailed in the works of Ipingbemi (2009) and Obi (2010). The Land Use Act of 1978 was particularly impactful, as it transferred all land ownership to the federal government (Achunike, 2020). Similarly, the Petroleum Act granted the federal government complete ownership and control over all petroleum resources. This legislative framework left the communities in the Niger Delta without any legal rights to the oil and gas extracted from their land (Achunike, 2020). Consequently, these communities could not claim compensation for the environmental damages caused by the activities of multinational oil companies, as highlighted by Obi (2010). The situation has been especially burdensome for towns, where oil exploitation and production are prevalent (Achunike, 2020).

Table 2. *Contribution of the Petroleum Sector to the Nigerian Economy (1958–1990).*

<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Fed. Govt. total revenue (US\$)</b>	<b>Revenue from petroleum (US\$)</b>	<b>Share of petroleum in total revenue (%)</b>	<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Fed. Govt. total revenue (US\$)</b>	<b>Revenue from petroleum (US\$)</b>	<b>Share of petroleum in total revenue (%)</b>
<b>1958</b>	154,632	122	0.08	<b>1975</b>	5,177,370	463,816	8.96
<b>1959</b>	177,648	1,776	1.00	<b>1976</b>	5,861,600	4,611,700	78.68
<b>1960</b>	223,700	2,452	1.10	<b>1977</b>	7,070,400	5,965,500	84.37
<b>1961</b>	228,962	17,070	7.46	<b>1978</b>	8,358,400	5,965,500	71.37
<b>1962</b>	231,638	16,936	7.31	<b>1979</b>	7,252,400	4,809,200	66.31
<b>1963</b>	249,152	10,060	4.04	<b>1980</b>	12,273,400	10,100,400	82.30
<b>1964</b>	299,132	16,084	5.38	<b>1981</b>	15,813,100	4,936,900	31.22
<b>1966</b>	321,870	29,175	9.06	<b>1982</b>	10,143,900	8,847,800	87.22
<b>1967</b>	339,196	44,976	13.26	<b>1983</b>	10,811,400	7,253,000	67.09
<b>1968</b>	300,176	41,884	13.95	<b>1984</b>	11,738,500	8,209,700	69.94
<b>1969</b>	299,986	29,582	9.86	<b>1985</b>	15,041,800	10,975,100	72.96
<b>1970</b>	435,908	75,444	17.31	<b>1986</b>	12,302,000	8,107,300	65.90
<b>1971</b>	755,605	196,390	25.99	<b>1987</b>	25,099,800	19,027,000	75.81
<b>1972</b>	1,410,811	720,185	51.05	<b>1988</b>	27,310,800	20,933,800	76.65
<b>1973</b>	1,389,911	576,151	41.45	<b>1989</b>	50,272,100	41,334,400	82.22
<b>1974</b>	2,171,370	1,549,383	71.36	<b>1990</b>	4,765,700	4,624,400	97.04

Source: Okotie, 2018.

The discovery of oil initially brought economic prosperity to Oloibiri and Nigeria, yet the benefits were transient and unevenly distributed. Despite the significant wealth generated by the oil industry, the closure of the Oloibiri oilfield in 1978, after producing over 20 million barrels of oil during its 20-year lifecycle, led to economic decline (Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Steyn, 2009). This unexpected shutdown

significantly disrupted the local economy and marked a permanent shift for Oloibiri. Once celebrated as the birthplace of Nigeria's oil industry and known for its rich forest resources, fishing, and snail farming, the town has become a neglected emblem of national economic aspirations, epitomized by a poignant signpost stating, 'Welcome to Oloibiri town, the Goose that lays the Golden Egg.' (see figure 5) (Gandu, 2014; Staff reporter, 1995).

*Figure 5:* Entrance sign to Oloibiri Town, Bayelsa State.



*Source:* Author, 2017

This sign stands as a symbolic representation of Oloibiri's historical and economic significance, underscoring how years of oil extraction have transformed it into a mere shadow of its former self, crippling its traditional occupations (Enyia, 1991). Though these observations were made decades ago, they continue to resonate as Oloibiri struggles with recovery. Participant 018 lamented: "the closure hit us hard; it was like losing a part of our soul." The town's plight was compounded by inadequate compensation for the environmental and social damages caused by decades of oil extraction (Achunike, 2020; Osaghae, 2015). Furthermore, the legal frameworks established by the Nigerian government, which monopolized resource ownership, deprived Niger Delta communities of any potential benefits from these resources, leaving them without legal rights to compensation for the resources extracted from their land (Achunike, 2020; Ejobowah, 2000; Ipingbemi, 2009; Obi, 2010). These measures contributed to a deteriorating environmental and political climate that has affected the residents' lives.

#### **4.0 Socio-Economic Impacts of Industrial Closure**

The cessation of a dominant industry, as documented by Fashoyin (1990) and Lewis (1996), often results in increased unemployment, reduced household income, and a decline in public services due to dwindling fiscal resources. This effect is acutely felt in areas heavily reliant on a single industrial sector, where closures can precipitate significant economic and social challenges. In the case of Nigeria, a major economic boom was experienced in the 1960s and 1970s, driven by the

burgeoning oil sector. However, this period of prosperity eventually gave way to economic and social challenges in the 1980s. This shift was characterized by economic mismanagement, an overreliance on oil revenues, and a neglect of the agricultural sector, which had previously been a cornerstone of the economy (Guseh & Oritsejafor, 2007). Concurrently, Nigeria faced a growing external debt crisis and internal issues of mismanagement and corruption, contributing to economic instability.

In the Niger Delta, the impact of these national economic trends has been pronounced. Post-Nigerian Civil War, the Federal Government significantly reduced petroleum revenue allocation to the Niger Delta States from 50% in 1969 to 3% in 1999 (Ejobowah, 2000), exacerbating the region's economic and infrastructural challenges and escalating poverty rates. Recent reports from Oyadongha and Idio (2016) and Willie (2019) reveal challenges of abject poverty and lack of basic amenities in the town of Oloibiri. The Niger Delta Human Development Report indicates a Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.564 for the region, notably lower than countries with similar oil and gas reserves, such as Venezuela (0.772) and Indonesia (0.697; United Nations Development Programme, 2006). Despite its vast oil reserves, the region's gross national product per capita is below the national average of USD 280, prompting increased militancy among the populace, especially the youth, in their quest for resource control (Shell, 2011, 2012, 2013; Osaghae, 2015).

The Nigerian economy's shift from agriculture to oil resulted in shifts in employment from the agricultural sector, significantly reducing its contribution to employment from the 1960s to the 1980s (Burfitt & Ferrari, 2013; Hilson, 2002; Lawrie et al., 2011; Siyongwana & Shabalala, 2019). This transition has had a considerable social and economic impact on towns like Oloibiri (Stanley, 1990). The cessation of oil operations in such towns often results in community migration, loss of identity, and changes in family structures, issues that have been observed across various communities in both the Global South and North. However, unlike some communities that have managed to diversify economically and build resilience after initial difficulties, Oloibiri's response and adaptation strategies have been shaped by its historical significance in Nigeria's oil narrative and the socio-political context of the Niger Delta region as noted by Akpan (2005), Orogun (2010), and Tonwe et al. (2012).

Frynas (2001), Ifeka (2005), and Watts (2011) document the negative effects on the environment, economy, politics, and social life in the region. Okoji (2002) notes that these impacts extend to changes in the indigenous people's way of life, culture, economy, family, and psychology. Cultural influences are substantial. Akhionbare and Osuji (2013) report that oil company activities have led to the destruction of historical worship places and erosion of traditional values. The influx of oil workers has altered community norms, increasing instances of sexual pervasiveness and promiscuity (Okpako, 2014). Ochogba et al. (2017) observe that traditional cultural elements like dress, food, festivals, and music are fading away in some communities.

The oil activities in the Niger Delta have also fueled local conflicts, as noted by Akhionbare et al. (2013) and Frynas (2001). These conflicts often stem from the government and oil companies' unresponsiveness to local demands, leading to peaceful protests turning into violent confrontations (Amnesty International, 2009, 2017). Watts (2011, 2004) highlights the abandonment of Oloibiri and details how legislation like the Land Use Act of 1978 removed land rights and royalty claims from communities, exacerbating tensions. The youth are also impacted, Oluwaniyi (2010) describes them as key agents of social transformation, either peacefully or

violently, to counter exclusion and exploitation. Movements like (a) the Supreme Egbesu Assembly, (b) the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, (c) Niger Delta Volunteer Force, (d) Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, and (e) the Kaiama Declaration reflect youth-led resistance for resource control (Achunike, 2020; Wiwa, 2014). These actions stem from demands for improved living conditions, education, and employment opportunities, which often escalate into militancy due to prolonged neglect and marginalization by oil companies and the government (Achunike, 2020). Militancy in these regions involves hostage-taking, oil facility attacks, and an increase in weaponization, serving both as a form of protest and a survival strategy (Shell, 2018; Achunike, 2020). Watts (2007) reveals the role of politicians in fueling militancy and acknowledges oil thefts controlled by militants as part of their struggle.

The government's response, primarily through the Joint Military Task Force, has often only intensified the violence, leading to further insecurity and fear among the local populations (Amnesty International, 2009). Participant 001, a young woman from Oloibiri, described this environment: "We live in constant fear. The sound of boots and guns has become our daily melody. Our sons, our fathers, are caught between the militants and the military." Adding to this, Participant 015 shared his perspective on the community's resilience and the ongoing struggles: "Each day we strive to teach our children hope and resilience in the face of adversity. It's disheartening to see the cycle of poverty and violence perpetuated by a lack of meaningful support and opportunities." This sentiment illustrates the community's determination to overcome its challenges while also highlighting the need for external support. The mental health impacts are significant. Okonofua (2013) discusses the 'triangulation' conflict strategy, which places youth at the center of political struggles and affecting their mental health. Onyechi et al. (2016) highlight the prevalence of significant PTSD issues among youth in oil-impacted communities, underscoring the psychological scars left by these conflicts.

## **5.0 Environmental Degradation in Resource-rich Communities**

The Niger Delta region, including Oloibiri, has experienced environmental damage due to industrial activities, primarily from oil drilling. Studies by Uyigie and Agho (2007), and Edet (2017) have documented significant impacts such as soil contamination, water pollution, and biodiversity loss, which have long-term implications for community health and local ecosystem sustainability. Reports by THISDAYLIVE (n.d.) and Adeleke (2020) emphasize the extensive impact of pollution and the compounding effect of inadequate infrastructure, exacerbating the area's environmental challenges. While similar patterns of degradation are identified in other regions by Kessey and Arko (2013), Kazindu et al. (2020), and Fayiga et al. (2018), the situation in Oloibiri is distinguished by its scale and complexity. Fayiga et al. (2018), Dore (2000), and McNeill and Vrtis (2017) note that communities across Africa, South America, and North America have encountered comparable environmental challenges; however, Oloibiri's situation is uniquely severe due to its intense industrial activity and the historical context of its environmental degradation.

The persistent environmental impacts in the Niger Delta, including Oloibiri, have been extensively documented by researchers such as Eweje (2006) and Kadafa (2012). Their findings indicate that the degradation from oil spills and the disposal of industrial waste can persist for decades, leading to significant socio-economic and ecological consequences. Amnesty International (2011) corroborates these impacts,

noting their long-term nature. The region, heavily impacted by multinational oil companies, has been characterized as an ecological disaster. Okeagu et al. (2006) specifically refer to it as an "environmental disaster zone" (p.204) highlighting that between 1986 and 1996, approximately 2.5 million barrels of crude oil were spilled, and around eight million cubic feet of natural gas were burnt daily. Additionally, the transportation of oil via pipelines to refineries and export points often results in corrosion and the bursting of pipes, further exacerbating the frequency and severity of oil spills on land and in waterways (Amnesty International, 2015; Achunike, 2020).

The environmental damage in the Niger Delta is also impactful, affecting various facets of the ecosystem and community life. Oil contamination has damaged mangrove swamps, wetlands, and land areas, with the contamination reaching several meters deep into the soil and affecting groundwater across large regions. This widespread contamination has serious human health implications, particularly concerning drinking water contamination. Studies by Kadafa (2012), Achunike (2020), and the United Nations Environment Programme (2011) document these impacts extensively. The resultant spills have forced some residents and communities to relocate entirely, leading to the loss of ancestral homes, and have caused freshwater pollution, destruction of forests and agricultural land, depletion of fishing grounds, and a reduction in fish production, which is a source of income in the region (Elum et al., 2016). Participant 004 expressed his despair: "The waters are no longer blue but black with oil. Our nets come up with more sludge than fish. It's devastating to see our way of life dissolve in front of our eyes." The network of creeks and rivers in the Niger Delta, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean, increases the spread of oil spills to neighboring communities, turning the water brackish and unsuitable for drinking and laundry purposes. Participant 009, living near the Delta, shared her frustrations: "Every day is a battle for clean water. What used to be clear streams are now toxic flows that endanger our health daily." Amnesty International (2013a, b) and the United Nations Development Programme (2006b) report similar findings across the region. Residents have had to source drinking water from a river contaminated by oils. Participant 008, a mother of three, shared her distress, saying, "Every day, we fetch water from the river that's been poisoned by oil. It's a risk we are forced to take. Clean water, which should be our right, feels like a luxury." Despite prolonged protests, Shell, which has been operating in the region for over 40 years, provided a borehole in 2004, although the company had access to basic and social facilities within its camp, unlike the local inhabitants (Oluwaniyi, 2010). Okeagu et al. (2006) also highlight the serious health issues stemming from land and groundwater pollution, including continuous outbreaks of diarrhea, birth deformities, and soft tissue cancers. Despite these alarming conditions, the Niger Delta remains one of the most polluted regions globally (Achunike, 2020). Amnesty International (2018) emphasized this, noting that significant cleanup efforts are still required despite the United Nations Environmental Program's (2006b) recommendations. In response to these challenges, the community has not remained passive.

## **6.0 Community Development and Adaptation Strategies**

The adaptation of communities in the Global South to industrial changes has been a focal point in development studies. Researchers such as Markusen (1988), Hlatshwayo (2017), and Cuter (1999) have explored strategies employed by communities facing industrial decline or transformation. These include economic diversification and the development of alternative industries like tourism or agriculture to mitigate the impact of industrial closures.

Studies by Boschma (2017), Culter (1999), Nedeljković et al. (2019), and Sofield (2003) highlight examples where communities successfully shifted to sustainable tourism or technology-based industries after traditional industries waned. Success often depends on community leadership, access to resources, and external support. However, studies by Osbahr et al. (2010), Brown (2012), Bradbury & St-Martin (1983), and Tonts et al. (2012) reveal cases where adaptation strategies failed due to a lack of alternative employment, insufficient skill development, and limited government support, resulting in persistent unemployment and socio-economic decline.

For Oloibiri, learning from global examples offers important insights. The town's historical reliance on the oil industry presents unique challenges and opportunities for adaptation. Alakwe and Okpara (2022) and Sen (2010) suggest that leveraging Oloibiri's cultural and historical background could enhance tourism development, while investment in education and skills could foster economic diversification.

## **7.0 Lesson Learned**

The socio-economic and environmental experiences of Oloibiri provide lessons for other RBCs and inform broader resource management policies. This section synthesizes insights from Oloibiri's post-industrial decline, focusing on sustainable development and economic diversification.

A key lesson from Oloibiri's experience is the necessity of prioritizing citizen welfare. Despite substantial oil revenues, Oloibiri's residents have seen little benefit. Essential infrastructure such as reliable electricity, clean water, healthcare, and educational facilities remain inadequate. This disparity is highlighted in Adeleke's (2020) study, which details the ongoing deprivation. Achunike (2020) critiques the misallocation of resources and governmental failure to reinvest in community needs. The local infrastructure challenges include a government school founded in 1973 and a state-funded maternity health center, both suffering from underinvestment. The area is not connected to the national electricity grid, leaving residents dependent on diesel generators for power. This situation was slightly alleviated by donations, including a generator plant gifted in 1970 by Melford Okilo, then governor of River State, and a 350-KVA generator from a former local government chairman (Adeleke, 2020; Ige, 2023; Skar, 2023). In 2020, the federal government initiated the Nigeria Electrification Project to address these issues with solar hybrid mini-grids (Adeleke, 2020). Despite this, the transition to solar energy has been difficult for some residents who found the costs of meters and energy subscriptions unaffordable, leading them to opt out of the new system. Participant 018 expressed the community's frustration: "Our wealth has been extracted, but look around, our homes remain in darkness, our children learn in dilapidated schools. It's as if the oil was a curse rather than a blessing." This situation illustrates significant mismanagement of resource wealth. Rather than catalyzing development, the extracted resources failed to improve the local quality of life. Achunike (2020) emphasizes the need for transparent and accountable governance that leverages natural wealth to enhance community infrastructure and living standards. Governance in resource-rich regions must ensure that natural resource exploitation directly benefits local socio-economic conditions.

The environmental damage has precipitated serious health challenges, including increased respiratory issues and skin diseases. Participant 011, a local health worker, highlights the struggle: "Managing these health issues is challenging due to our inadequate healthcare facilities. Every day, we see patients suffering from conditions

directly linked to environmental contaminants, and our ability to help them is limited.” This situation stresses the need for multinational corporations to adhere strictly to ethical practices and environmental regulations. The situation observed in Oloibiri serves as a reminder of the responsibilities that corporations have to the communities in which they operate. Corporate responsibility extends beyond profit-making; it involves ensuring the prosperity and health of the community, safeguarding the environment, and contributing to the economic stability of the regions affected by their operations. This lesson calls for robust enforcement of corporate accountability to prevent exploitation and ensure a balance between resource utilization and community development.

The environmental legacy of industrial activities in Oloibiri, characterized by severe pollution and ecosystem disruption, highlights the urgent need for robust environmental policies. Decades of oil extraction have resulted in significant contamination of land and water, degraded air quality, and substantial biodiversity loss, as detailed in studies by Alike (2009), Opukri and Ibaba (2008), and Elum et al. (2016). These environmental challenges have reshaped the natural landscape and undermined traditional livelihoods, particularly in agriculture and fishing, which were once Oloibiri’s economic backbone. Participant 017, a local fisherman, described the impact: “The waters we once fished are now slick with oil, and the fish have either died or moved to cleaner waters. Our fishing heritage is fading away.” The pollution has also had profound public health implications, including increased respiratory problems, skin diseases, and other health issues directly attributed to environmental degradation (Yahaya, 2020). Participant 011 adds, “We’re seeing more and more respiratory issues and skin conditions each year. It’s clear that the environment we live in is greatly affecting our health.” This situation underscores the link between environmental health and public welfare, demonstrating how poor environmental management can trigger broad socio-economic and health crises. Oloibiri’s experience provides a critical lesson for global policymakers: sustainable industrial practices that balance ecological preservation with economic interests are essential. This calls for immediate, stringent environmental regulations at both national and international levels to compel industries to mitigate their impacts and help restore damaged ecosystems (Eregha & Irughe, 2009). Oloibiri’s history mandates that policymakers integrate environmental stewardship into industrial planning, ensuring a sustainable future. The lesson is clear: effective environmental policies are indispensable and require immediate, sustained action to prevent the kind of irreparable damage experienced by this community.

Oloibiri’s economic history illustrates the risks of dependence on a single industry. Initially, the oil boom fostered substantial development and a deceptive sense of security. However, as the sector declined, so did the economic stability of the community, exemplifying the pitfalls of economic monoculture. Participant 003 metaphorically depicted this risk as putting “all eggs in one basket,” emphasizing the precarious nature of such reliance. Economic resilience theory advocates for diversification during times of prosperity to buffer against downturns, a strategy supported by Oloibiri’s experience. Communities that have successfully diversified into sectors like technology, tourism, and agriculture illustrate this approach’s efficacy. These sectors not only stabilize economies but also enable sustained growth, even as primary industries experience fluctuations. Boschma’s (2017) research on regional resilience provides empirical support for the benefits of diversification.

In addition to economic dependency, Oloibiri faces substantial educational and vocational training gaps, hindering the community's capacity to diversify economically beyond the oil sector. The lack of adequate educational facilities and vocational programs limits personal and professional development of residents, perpetuating unemployment and ongoing poverty. This situation underscores the need for investment in capacity building, which is fundamental to sustainable development (Ako, Okonmah, & Ogunleye, 2009). Efforts to establish educational institutions and training centers are crucial to addressing these gaps. Participant 020, a local youth, shared, “We have few opportunities for advanced training here. Most of us are ready to work, but there are no jobs that match our basic skills, and no opportunities to learn more.” This sentiment highlights the necessity of initiatives that include partnerships with existing educational institutions and industries to better align training with job market needs (Afinotan & Ojatorotu, 2009). Enhancing educational opportunities and creating targeted employment prospects are essential for enabling Oloibiri to develop a skilled workforce capable of supporting a diversified economy. Focused investment in education and vocational training is key for navigating the fluctuations of the oil industry and achieving a dynamic and sustainable economic environment (Adomokai & Sheate, 2004). Such strategic initiatives are essential for breaking the cycle of dependency and establishing a foundation for long-term community resilience and prosperity. This approach will help convert temporary economic booms into sustained growth (Akpomovie, 2011).

## **8.0 Activism, Community Response, and the Way Forward**

The activism in Oloibiri, as documented by Usang & Ikpeme (2015) and Ako et al. (2009), highlights the power of community mobilization. Residents have demonstrated remarkable resilience through grassroots efforts and persistent advocacy, seeking justice and accountability from multinational corporations and the government. Their fight for environmental remediation, fair compensation, and ethical corporate practices serves as a model for communities facing similar challenges (Mmadu, 2013).

Empowering local communities to actively participate in their development is crucial for building resilience and shaping their long-term future. Oloibiri's activism has reshaped the narrative surrounding their community, transforming Oloibiri's identity from a victim of industrial exploitation to a symbol of resistance and empowerment (Nwakunor, 2021). Local voices are essential in decision-making and policy formulation, with their impact extended through national and international alliances that amplify their message (Enyia, 1991).

The path to recovery for Oloibiri involves addressing environmental damages and promoting economic diversification. Restoring polluted areas and expanding into sectors like agriculture, technology, and tourism are vital for sustainable development. Collaborative efforts among government, oil companies, civil society, and local community are crucial for implementing effective solutions that meet the community's needs (Kadafa, 2012). In addition, education and awareness programs focusing on environmental preservation, sustainable practices, and legal rights are crucial for empowering the community. An informed and engaged community is better equipped to participate in its development and hold responsible parties accountable. This approach addresses the immediate needs and lays the groundwork for long-term prosperity and environmental health.

## 9.0 Conclusion

The tale of Oloibiri is a call to action and a reminder of the resilience inherent in human communities. Oloibiri, initially buoyed by the prospects of prosperity through oil, has experienced a trajectory marked by shattered promises, environmental ruin, and socio-economic hardship. Yet, within this narrative lies an essential lesson about the necessity for transformative change. The oversight Oloibiri has faced illustrates the consequences that can arise when communities are marginalized in the rush for economic gain, underscoring the need for sustainable development approaches that prioritize community well-being alongside environmental stewardship.

Healing the scars left by decades of exploitation in Oloibiri requires a multifaceted approach: addressing the environmental damage, fostering sustainable economic development, and, crucially, empowering the local populace. The path forward for Oloibiri must be paved through collaboration and a commitment to accountability and justice. This involves the Nigerian government, oil corporations, the broader international community and, importantly, the residents. By working collectively, there is an opportunity to transform Oloibiri from a symbol of exploitation to one of resilience and sustainable development.

The story of Oloibiri should serve as a catalyst for positive change, a clarion call that resonates beyond its borders, inspiring other resource-rich communities to navigate the challenges of exploitation thoughtfully and effectively. Learning from Oloibiri's past opens the potential to forge a future where resource extraction is not only an economic transaction but a process that benefits and uplifts communities, conserves the environment, and lays the foundation for sustainable, equitable development. In essence, the legacy of Oloibiri should not be viewed solely as a tragic chapter in history but as a compelling motivator for change and progress. It stands as a testament to the strength and determination of its people and serves as a beacon for similar communities worldwide, illuminating a path toward a more just, sustainable, and prosperous future.

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