

Lesson 3 Book Excerpt**Niger Delta**

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Since the doors to foreign investors [in Nigeria] were flung open near the end of British colonial rule, oil companies have pumped hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of crude out of Nigeria, most from the Niger Delta, while consistently treating its land, water, and people with undisguised disdain. Wastewater was dumped directly into rivers, streams, and the sea; canals from the ocean were dug willy-nilly, turning precious freshwater sources salty, and pipelines were left exposed and unmaintained, contributing to thousands of spills. In an often cited statistic, an Exxon Valdez—worth of oil has spilled in the Delta every year for about fifty years, poisoning fish, animals, and humans.

But none of this compares with the misery that is gas flaring. Over the course of extracting oil, a large amount of natural gas is also produced. If the infrastructure for capturing, transporting, and using that gas were built in Nigeria, it could meet the electricity needs of the entire country. Yet in the Delta, the multinational companies mostly opt to save money by setting it on fire, or flaring it, which sends the gas into the atmosphere in great pillars of polluting fire. The practice is responsible for about 40 percent of Nigeria's total CO₂ emissions... Meanwhile, more than half of Delta communities lack electricity and running water, unemployment is rampant, and, in a cruel irony, the region is plagued by fuel shortages.