

Curbing Oil Theft and Pipeline Vandalism in Nigeria's Niger Delta: Copenhagen, Denmark as a Blueprint

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Nigeria remains a pivotal player in the global oil and gas industry, with an estimated 32 billion barrels of crude oil reserves concentrated in the Niger Delta. This wealth of resources places the country at the heart of international energy security, supplying significant volumes to major economies. For instance, the United States imported crude oil worth \$4.73 billion from Nigeria in 2023 alone, underscoring the country's critical role in stabilising global oil prices. Yet, Nigeria paradoxically suffers some of the highest levels of oil theft and pipeline vandalism unprecedented among OPEC members. Current estimates indicate losses of over 400,000 barrels per day, translating to economic damages exceeding \$10 billion annually. These figures reveal a troubling contradiction between Nigeria's global energy significance and its internal security governance challenges. Traditional top-down security measures, ranging from militarised task forces have proven inadequate, since the problem persists unabated.

This reality reflects the need for innovative approaches that transcend conventional security frameworks. This is because unconventional problems require unconventional solutions. The integration of experiential strategies into security governance represents a paradigm shift, particularly in

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addressing entrenched oil theft and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta. Drawing inspiration from Denmark's Copenhill, an innovative waste-to-energy facility that integrates recreational spaces to foster community ownership, such strategies suggest reimagining security governance as a participatory and culturally resonant endeavour. By involving local communities and aligning security initiatives with cultural identities, experiential events can build trust, foster cooperation, and mitigate anti-social tendencies because of the emotional dimension. For the Niger Delta, this could mark a critical shift toward sustainable solutions, transforming the region from a hub of crisis into a model of cooperative governance.

At the heart of Copenhill's success lies its ability to transcend functional utility, embedding emotional, sensory, and social connections that align with the community's identity. This principle, rooted in the *experience economy*, conceptualised by Pine and Gilmore in 1999, holds profound implications for security governance. Experiences that engage communities on emotional and cultural levels not only build trust but also improve overall wellbeing and reduce adversarial behaviours. In the Niger Delta, where grievances over exclusion and exploitation often fuel sabotage and theft, integrating experiential elements into security frameworks could bridge the gap between state interventions and community buy-in.

The Federal Government's engagement of Tantita Security Services in 2022 marks a critical step toward leveraging local participation in security efforts. Tantita's early successes, such as recovering significant volumes of stolen oil, demonstrate the operational benefits of involving local stakeholders. However, this participatory models risk devolving into tokenism. Genuine community ownership requires not only operational collaboration but co-creating meaningful experiences that resonate with the host communities, which is more sustainable.

My argument is that there is the need for a nuanced application of experiential governance, drawing from the Niger Delta's existing rich cultural traditions, including festivals, dances, and communal rituals. These cultural elements offer fertile ground for designing experiences while addressing historical disenfranchisement like poverty and marginalisation. Experiential strategies, such as community-led surveillance activities or cultural forums tied to governance initiatives, could foster a shared sense

of pride and responsibility, transforming security from a transactional exercise into a relational, co-creative process.

The Niger Delta's challenges exemplify the broader imperative of rethinking security governance in ways that honour local contexts and promote sustainability. Effective governance requires communities to see themselves as co-creators of solutions, not mere recipients. Experiential approaches offer a promising pathway to achieving this vision, blending functional efficacy with emotional resonance to cultivate trust, loyalty, and long-term security. For regions like the Niger Delta, this model holds the potential to transcend the failures of the past and build a more inclusive and enduring framework for the future.