



STORIES
FROM
THE CREEKS OF THE
NIGER DELTA

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November 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Stories from the Creeks of the Niger Delta

This publication is a result of the **Global Day of Climate** action, organized by **Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF)** at **Odimodi** and **Okuntu** communities in **Burutu** Local Government Area of **Delta State, Niger Delta region, Nigeria**.

The action was supported by the **Africa Climate Justice Group (ACJG)** as part of its follow up action to the just concluded first ever **African Peoples Counter COP**.

CODAF is grateful to the African Center for Environmental and Rural Development (ACERD), The Mail Newspaper, the Vanguard Newspaper and the Galaxy TV for participating actively in the action.

Our sincere appreciation also goes to the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) for recommending CODAF to share in this opportunity.



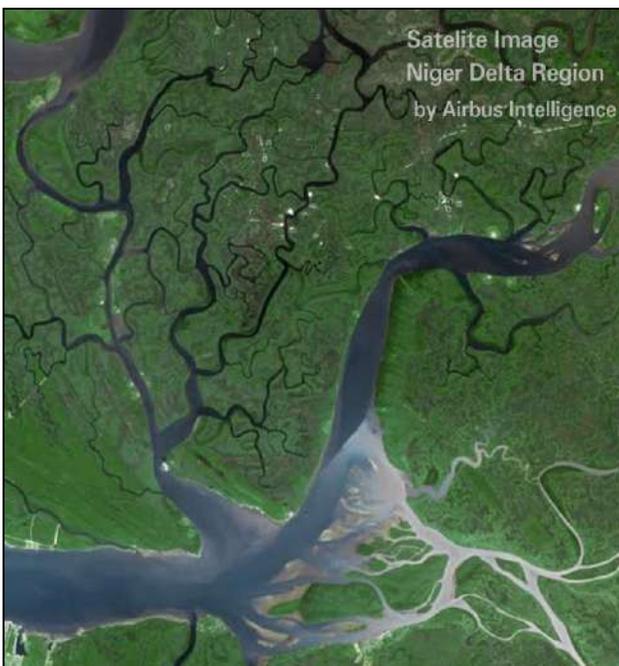
ABOUT THE ACTION

CODAF carried out a sea-side action to monitor, report, engage and expose (MORE-E) decades of climate and environmental crisis committed against the indigenous people of the Niger Delta (especially those living in the creeks) by Shell, AGIP, Chevron and a host of other extractive industries. CODAF observed that most of the spills that happened in the creeks of the Niger Delta are under reported, because women and fisher folks do not have the platforms to tell their pollution stories. This indeed, is a gap that exists and one of the reasons why this climate action was carried out. CODAF partnered with women and youth of targeted communities, community led groups, other NGO coalitions and the media who were very passionate in reporting the action.

The action targeted major oil industries and the Nigerian government that has drifted from being regulators to being regulated. CODAF campaign messages were focused on the cleanup of the Niger Delta, Restoration of the mangrove ecosystem, Fish not Oil – government declare a state of emergency in the fishing sector. Leave the oil in the soil, Shell commit to real zero and not Net Zero. No more offshore oil drilling etc.

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region is an area abundantly blessed in natural resources; be it palm oil, rubber, fish or crude oil. Indeed, since the advent of crude oil exploration, the Niger Delta is reputed for its rich reserves of black gold. Beyond vast oil and gas deposits, the region is blessed with good agricultural land, expansive forest, excellent fisheries and large labor force but juxtaposed against the potential for economic good and sustainable development, are deteriorating economic and social conditions that had been largely ignored by contemporary policies and action. There is an urgent need for these shortcomings to be addressed to a large extent.



The region could experience a loss of 40% of its inhabitable terrain in the next thirty years as a result of extensive dam construction in the region. The advent of oil production has also negatively impacted the Niger Delta region due to unprecedented oil spillage which has been ongoing for the past 5 decades, making the region one of the most polluted in the world. It is estimated that while the European Union experienced 10 incidences of oil spills in 40 years, Nigeria recorded 9,343 cases within 10 years. The carelessness of the oil industry has also precipitated this situation, which can perhaps be best encapsulated by a 1983 report issued by the NNPC, long before popular unrest surfaced.

We witnessed the slow poisoning of the waters of this region and the destruction of vegetation, agricultural land and good water sources by oil spills which occur during petroleum operations. But since the inception of the oil industry in Nigeria, more than fifty years ago, there has been no concerned and effective effort on the part of the government, let alone the oil operators, to control environmental problems associated with the industry'.

The resultant environmental degradation from gas flaring, dredging of larger rivers, oil spillage and reclamation of land due to oil and gas extraction across the Niger Delta region, costs about US\$758 million every year.

Regrettably, 75% of the cost is borne by the local communities through polluted water, infertile farmland and lost biodiversity.



PROJECT TARGET COMMUNITIES

The communities (Odimodi and Okuntu) under review in this report are located at Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State. Odimodi is an Ijaw Riverine community located in Burutu Local Government Area Delta state, Nigeria.

The community is about 2 hours by water (speed boat) from Warri. The community, which is more of an island due to its accessibility by water only, is about 3 square kilometres (habitable area). Odimodi, like other communities located in the swampy mangrove rain forest zone of the Niger Delta, has two major seasons yearly. These are the dry (November to early April) and raining seasons (late April to October).



Odimodi being located close to the creek oil field and the H-Block neighboring community of the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC), the community has several oil wells, pipelines and is also impacted by oil exploration activities in the zone. It shares boundaries with Agge at the eastern axis, Ogulagha at the western; Forcados at the Northern axis and while to the southern axis is Biniboye village.

The town hall meeting triangulated information from various sources including secondary data, transect walks, community mapping, focus group discussion, Venn diagrams, seasonal calendars, wealth ranking, problem analysis, semi structured interviews and observations.

Okuntu is mainly a fisher folks community located in Ogulagha kingdom, also in Burutu LGA, Delta state. It has several other villages that has developed to a community, such as Ibabebe and Agalakiri community etc. The Primary occupation of the people is Fishing/Farming. Okuntun community has an average population of about 1000 inhabitants. The Leadership structure of the community has a central ruling executive body with a chairman and 7 other cabinet members, the women body also with a chairlady and other cabinet members, same with the youths, it has a youth president and other cabinet members as well. One unique attribute of this community is, it is a colony made of diverse tribes, but living as a unit.

OUR ENVIRONMENT, OUR FISHERIES

Considering the adverse effect of increase in oil spills on fish production in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, Oil spills are usually due to continuous incidence of vandalism and corrosion of oil pipelines, which destroys aquatic life and pollute the environment such that, agricultural activities become near impossible in the affected areas. The long-term effect of an oil spill incidence is usually associated with a reduction in crop yield and death of fish. Nevertheless, several studies have shown that the pollution caused by oil spillage does not end with the mopping up of the spilled oil in the land area or water. It is now known that health risk is not averted by abstinence from fish killed by spilled oil. Some of the fishes and animals that escape instant death from pollution are known to have taken in some of the toxic substances, which in turn get into human beings that consume them via bioaccumulation. This will in turn cause infections in man coupled with other “side effects in form of genetic mutations”. There is strong scientific proof that, fish is a major indicator for environmental contamination, providing evidence for transmission of pollutants in marine ecosystems.



It is a known fact that oil activities depress fish production in the long run because of the unwholesome environmental degradation that accompanies exploration of crude oil in the region. Oil driven environmental factors affecting fishing activities include gas flaring, oil well blowouts, improper disposal of drilling mud and pipeline leakages as observed in Odimodi and Okuntu communities.

This suggests the prioritization of sites for the clean-up exercise in the Niger Delta region, equally noting that high risk areas may not necessarily imply the most contaminated zones, but based on the observed levels of hydrocarbon contamination and importance of the zone to the livelihood of the inhabitants.

Furthermore, labor involvement in fish production improves fish outputs in the region, exerting a positive and substantial influence on fish production. Sustainable improvement in the agricultural sector requires skilled and able-bodied youths to engage in the agricultural process. This would drastically increase agricultural outputs in the region providing jobs for the unemployed youths and reducing incidence of restiveness in the region. Some of the challenges include a high rate of loan default by farmers; lack of full cooperation by participating banks.

This also supports the assertion that the nature of operating equipment used by the oil companies, including pipeline vandalization by errant youths of the region are contributory factors to the number of oil spills on the environment, which constitute a setback to fish production and agricultural productivity resulting from the destruction of the environment.

This result is in tandem with the observation in the socioeconomic consequences of oil spill on the environment, recommending an improvement in the infrastructure and equipment in order to prevent oil spills and the attendant youth restiveness resulting from deprivation.



(This well is the only source of water in the Okuntu community)

PHOTO COLLAGE



PHOTO COLLAGE



THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE FISHING SECTOR

The role and importance of women in relation to environment and development in the Niger Delta is crucial, because women depend on the environment for their daily needs such as water, fuel, food, etc.

Women do not only endure most of the environmental degradation, but also play a vital role in environmental management. The issues that pose as challenges are worrisome as they reduce the quality of life of women and the entire human population of the Niger Delta. The threat to the resource base and existence of the Niger Delta in this regard, underscores the Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Thus, the threat to women's economic activities in Niger Delta is not a local or national issue but is of international concern and requires examination.



Fishing activities in these communities were investigated to determine the role of women in its development and sustainability. Results indicated that married women are actively involved in fishing activities on a regular basis, when compared to the older women who carry out fishing on part time basis. In Okutun, women are mainly involved in the marketing of fish products rather than processing or active fishing. Women are more involved in picking of shell fishes such as oyster, periwinkle at low tide than fishing in creeks and rivers. Fish processing in the community is done mostly by smoking using a standing oven which can dry a lot of fish at a time.

The marketing strategies adopted by most women in selling their fishery products in the area are open market display and hawking, although some sell their catch at landing jetties to buyers. Lack of credit facilities, poor transportation network and upsurge in criminal activities have been identified as major constraints facing women involvement in fishery activities in the area. There is therefore, the need to empower the women fisher folks in these areas through granting of loans and credit facilities, capacity building, introduction of new technologies and improved transport network systems. These will go a long way in boosting fish production, improve their livelihood and enhance socio-economic status of the women fisher folks in Odimodi and Okutun.

Similar to industrial fish, farming and aquacultures, large scale fishing also has devastating environmental impacts. Industrial fishing operations sometimes uses a technique called "bottom trawling," which takes place when fishing boats drag giant nets across the ocean floor.

These nets scrape up fish and anything else in their path wreaking havoc on delicate ecosystems and ocean habitats. The United Nations estimates that up to 95% of global ocean damage is a direct result of bottom trawling. In the Niger Delta communities, fish populations are dwindling due to overfishing and pollution caused by the activities of the oil industries and this could have disastrous results to human life. Experts predict fishless oceans by the year 2048. This is important because the ocean plays a big part in regulating temperature and it also creates fifty percent of our oxygen on Earth.

In Okuntu community, where CODAF recently carried out a climate action, the fishing activities which support the livelihoods of the fishing community are faced with twin issues that are connected to industrial activities. Firstly, the ocean supporting the fishing life of the people is seen as a waste disposal receptacle where Shell disposed of its effluent coupled with uncontrolled spills from fishing ships and the facilities of the oil industries. This position was confirmed to CODAF team by Chief **Kessington Temewei**, who narrated their experience living around the sea side that receives all manner of effluent which contains toxic chemicals from Shell facilities. Secondly, the fisher folks in the community alleged that, industrial fishing activities is another obstacle the community are meant to live with, as trolleys of unidentified fishing industries, intentionally remove the fishnets of the fisher folks and sometimes, sink their fishing boats. These unidentified fishing industries carry out their fishing activities with the aid of armed security forces that often shoot to scare fisher folks whose fishing gears and boats have been

CODAF INTERVENTION

November 6 was set aside to organize a climate action globally. Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF) and African Centre for Environmental and Rural Development (ACERD) hinged on this to carry out a sea-side action to monitor, report, engage and expose (MORE-E) decades of climate and environmental crisis committed against the indigenous people of the Niger Delta (especially those living in the creeks) by extractive industries.

The action, which kicked off at Odimodi community terminated at the sea-side of Okuntu and Ibabebe communities with a rally. Feedback from the action revealed that Shell is yet to carry out a proper cleanup of the oil spill that occurred in 2018 at Odimodi as the oil is still visible in the community. Shells effluent discharge point was discovered at Okuntu community.



Flagging off the action, the Executive Director of CODAF, **Benin E. Richard**, informed the community that the aim of the action was to strengthen the resilience of the suffering host communities in the Niger Delta and to also propagate their demands to concerned bodies. The effects of climate change could be devastating to vulnerable coastal and marine areas as well as to the function and structure of their ecosystems. Benin said, “the increasing sea level changes the shape of coastlines, contributes to coastal erosion and leads to flooding and more underground salt-water intrusion and wiping out of communities by the sea side like what we are already seeing at Forcados and Okuntu communities.”

Receiving the team, the Vice chairman of Odimodi Community, **Godgift Egberibo**, said the meeting was very significant to their plight while the Secretary of Okuntu community **Mr Monfort Mebilanje**, said the engagement became an eye opener and an opportunity for them to tell their stories to the world.



Lamenting, **Mrs. Monday Alagoa**, said: “Crude oil spillage has polluted our lands and water bodies affecting fishing and farming activities.”

Other respondents in Odimodi community also confirmed that oil and gas activities over the years have created astronomical depletion in the regenerative biodiversity of the ecosystem. Thus, a single farming venture of periwinkle which would have yielded about 600kg per household a decade ago yields less than 50kg. Also, the same depletion has affected crop farming in the communities.

While both communities share the same environmental and ecological crises, Okuntu is situated along the Atlantic shore line with the entire community being threatened by coastal erosion. The Okuntu community is gradually disappearing due to rising coastal erosion that had in the past, washed off part of the community.

Both Odimodi and Okuntu communities affirmed that there is a lack of government presence in the community, as all the promises made by the government to them as way of cushioning the effects of the oil pollution on the livelihoods and the health of the members of the communities have not been kept.

Fred Nohwo of **ACERD** warned that if offshore oil drilling activity is not discouraged, owing to the numerous environmental crimes being committed that are often covered up by the oil industries, most spills are immediately dispersed without recovery and cleanup.

CODAF team and the communities demanded that the oil industry should commit to real zero and not net zero which they said is the foundation in addressing all the climate and ecological crisis globally. They urged Nigerian government and the oil industries to clean up the Niger Delta and Restore the mangrove ecosystem, government declare a state of emergency in the fishing sector.

VOICES OF THE PEOPLE

Testimonies recorded from some community members include: -

A respondent **Golerei Wuli** (Female): As a fisherwoman, the crude oil spillage has cost them a lot of harm, her traps is damaged due to the oil spillage.

Station Oweibe (Female): A crop farmer also complained about the effect of the oil spillage on the crops saying “Harvest is poor it has really affected the economic situation in our community, we need help”.

As for **Parish Waregbamo** (Male): A plantain farmer “crops don’t germinate due to oil spillage and pollution of our land”. The harvest decreases every season, and the cleaning by Shell after the spillage was not properly done, this has a tremendous effect on our economy.

Iwajomo Queen (Female): A periwinkle farmer, “It is so bad that on a trip where we normally get three (3) sacks of periwinkle, now to pick one (1) sack is difficult”.

Agbarabebewei Sama (Male): “A retired fish farmer also complained of the downgliding of the trade due to the contamination by crude oil”.

Oborokumo Seleyabale (Male): “The river is over polluted, so we need a proper cleaning by Shell, the soil cannot grow good crops too, the community is impoverished.”

Members of the community did an Action call, calling out shell and the Government to hear their cry and come to their aid.

Patience Moses (Female) said many organizations have come to Okuntu community and made promises that were not met till date.

Baby Dove, another female respondent said “We can’t fish again because of oil spillage, so we have to sail deep into the high sea incurring more cost of fueling for our boat to enable us survive as a fishing community.

Abigail Omotenshe, a female respondent “There is no good water to drink or bath. No light in the community, and the spillage and effluent from Oil Company is destroying our nets and traps”.

Patience Oyibode (Female): “we use more fuel because of the distant we have to sail to catch fishes. We are living in debt and poverty. We really need help from the government”.



Ovo Truth, Female said “We need good water for drinking and bathing. We buy water from Oghulagha and only few families can afford that”.

Kemi Ibikunle (Female) popularly called **Mama Sele**, said the only primary School in the community have no teacher. Even the road to the school is not accessible, our children transport to other communities for secondary school”.

Members of the community did a march along the sea shore carrying placards/posters in an action call to Shell to stop the pollution of their water and lands.

THE COMMUNITIES ON A MARCH TO STOP THE POLLUTION OF THEIR WATERS AND LANDS



Community Development Advocacy (CODAF) is a non-governmental organization that is registered in Nigeria with focus on environmental advocacy work in Nigeria, to bridge the communication gap between policy makers and the grass root.



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