



# Stories of Resilience from the creeks of **Niger Delta** 2nd Edition

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

### Stories of Resilience from the Creeks of the Niger Delta [2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]

This publication is about the intervention of **Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF)** also known as Rural Community Empowerment Initiative (RUCEI) in **Odimodi** community and neighbouring communities in Burutu Local Government Area of **Delta State**, Niger Delta region, **Nigeria**.

The intervention that led to this publication was supported by the Community Resource Exchange (CRE). The support was provided to facilitate collaboration and collective strategy development with and between communities advocating for their rights in the context of international investments and development projects.

We are also thankful to **Oil Watch Africa** for the support for our initiative of engaging with fisher folks, **Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria**, **International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)** Edo State, **Fishnet Alliance** and the **African Center for Environmental and Rural Development (ACERD)** for their active collaboration in the entire project.



## **ABOUT TARGET COMMUNITY**

**Odimodi** is an Ijaw riverine community located in Burutu Local Government Area, Delta state, Nigeria, with an estimated population of about 3,000 people. It is the headquarters of **Iduwini Kingdom**.

The functional leadership structure of the Ijaw speaking tribe is made of the community chairman and his executives who oversee all community activities and representations. The community has three (3) major quarters namely the Ifikorowei, Ifiye and the Imbe/Bomuzouwei. The industrious women of Odimodi engage in fishing and farming activities.

The community is about 2 hours by water (speed boat) from Warri, and is more of an island due to its accessibility by water only, with 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).

## **ABOUT THE PROJECT**

Odimodi and other neighbouring communities are hosts to Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Agip and other Local Oil Companies (LOCs). These are a part of the Forcados terminal, trans-ramos pipeline, SPDC export line and loading platform, Agip Beniboye cooked wells.

The activities of these companies have constantly resulted in oil spills that have caused habitat destruction and loss of livelihood.

On Sunday August 21, 2022, an incident of toxic spills from Shell's facilities in Odimodi, is a testament of the incessant oil spills that occurs in the community and regrettably, it is the environment and the people that bears the brunt with little or no compensation.



*Photo of a polluted area in Odimodi*

## **RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IDENTIFIED**

In Odimodi, the major source of income is fishing, farming, and basket weaving, which has been greatly affected by environmental pollution from crude oil spillages, effluent discharge and gas flaring. The people have complained about this environmental assault being perpetrated on their ecosystem and its values upon which their livelihood depends on. E.g fishes, periwinkles, crops and other medicinal plants etc.

Thus, in order to survive, they must put themselves at risk by going further into the deep sea to catch, which is mostly by stroke of luck or venture deep into the mangrove forest in search of periwinkles, fire woods and other medicinal plants to sustain themselves and their families. This constraint has subjected most of their women to lack and poverty.

The CRE project which started from Odimodi community in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State, has transformed into an initiative that has drawn the attention of other oil producing and affected communities in the Niger Delta such as Forcados, Gele-gele, Ogula etc.

This project seeks to draw the attention of oil multinational, government bodies, civil society

organizations and the international community, to the issues of oil spills and chemical waste disposals that have destroyed the lands and waters around the Niger Delta, and the untold hardship it has caused the people.



*CODAF team in Odimodi*

The aim of this project is to call the attention oil multinationals in Odimodi to clean up the environment around Odimodi, to pay for the loss and damages caused by their activities and to create sustainable means of livelihood to elevate the poverty in the community, caused by the destruction of their habitat.

## **INTRODUCING THE PROJECT TO THE COMMUNITY**

The CRE project kicked off on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 2023 with a courtesy visit by the CODAF team to the Vice Chairman of Odimodi Community, Chief Isepagha Willie, led by the Executive Director of CODAF, Richard Benin.

The Vice Chairman of Odimodi Community, Chief Isepagha Willie who welcomed the CODAF team and the initiative was a welcome development as it is aimed at rescuing the people from the untold hardship[ they have suffered from crude oil activities.

According to him, the people of Odimodi have endured a great level of negligence from the oil multinational, after their crude oil have destroyed the sources of livelihood of the people which is dependent on their lands and waters.

He expressed his gratitude, explaining that the project will hopeful draw the attention of the world to the plight of the people of Odimodi.

## VILLAGE SQUARE MEETING

The next phase of the project was a village square meeting with the women of Odimodi, where the objectives of the project were shared with them.

Speaking at the meeting, the Executive Director of CODAF, **Richard Benin** expressed the need for the people of the community, especially the women, to speak up on the environmental issues affecting the community, as they are the forbearers of the environmental degradation they have suffered.

The women affirmed their eagerness, support and the will to participate in all areas that their input will be required. They lamented that several organizations and representatives of the oil companies had visited in the guise of bringing solutions to the issues facing the community without any result.

They expressed their interest in saving their community and to leave a better environment for their children.



## CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING

The third phase of the project was a Capacity Building Program organized to educate the women of Odimodi on Human Rights, Advocacy and Communication Skills.

The Executive Director of African Center for Environmental and Rural Development, **Nohwoh Fred** delivered a lecture on the Fundamental Human Rights, Environmental Rights, How the rights of the people can be violated and how the people can defend their rights.



Also speaking at the training, The Program Officer of CODAF and Communication expert, **Elvira Jordan** highlighted the importance of Advocacy and how best the women of Odimodi can communicate their advocacy agenda to the world through the use of social media, conventional media and their existing community radio.

The women appreciated they knowledge they have received, pledging to remain relentless in their fight against the harmful activities of the oil multinationals in their community.

Training manuals were made available for all participants.



## **MEDIA TOUR/ DOCUMENTARY**

Another phase of the project, the CODAF team took a tour round Odimodi Community to document the stories of the women and to view the level of environmental damages affecting the people.

The team consisted of the CODAF media team, other partner organizations and men of the press who interviewed several women and a man.

The Chairperson of Odimodi women, Mrs. **Silver Michael** stated that despite the destruction of their environment, Shell has done very little to help the people who have lost their sources of livelihood.

Mrs. Micheal said: "Their oil is a suffering to us. We are suffering. We can no longer fish to train our children because the oil has destroyed everything. We are dying of hunger. We can no longer pick periwinkles. We cannot fish or farm to train our children. We do not have portable drinking water ..."

A cross section of the Odimodi women who also spoke to the CODAF media team, lamented over the effects of the oil activities. Some of the women had contracted ailments and infractions due to the high level of crude oil in their farm lands, their waters and all over their environment.



*Program officer of CODAF in a chat with a woman in Odimodi*

Further expressing the damages of oil spills, the former Public relations Officer of Odimodi Community, Mr. **Godwin Awese** took the CODAF team to his farmlands to give a visual description of what people are facing.

Mr. Awese lamented that his farmlands which used to produce large quantities of plantain, cassava, water melon etc, had become unproductive after the oil spill, as stunted plantain and cassava stems were all that could be found on the farmland.

Several other women of the community spoke on their experiences and the damages they have suffered due to oil spills and crude oil activities. The information gathered from the media tour was compiled into a Documentary of over nine (9) minutes, with the title "The Dying Creeks of Odimodi".

## **LEGAL STRATEGY MEETING FOR FISHER FOLKS**

In collaboration with Environmental Rights Action/ Friends of the Earth Nigeria, CODAF organized a one-day interaction with the theme, "Niger Delta Legal and Strategy Meeting for Fisher Folk", to help host communities suffering from environmental degradation caused by oil multinationals.

The meeting which held on Thursday, 6th of April, 2023 at the headquarters of ERA/FoEN, had representatives from the International Federation of Women Lawyers in Edo State, the community representatives and other partner organizations.

Speaking at the event, the Executive Director of CODAF, Benin Richard stated that the program was organized to foster collaborations with capable organizations and agencies to ensure that the communities are protected.

He urged FIDA to involve environmental action in their scope, as women in the communities are mostly affected by the activities of the oil multinationals.

Representatives from Odimodi, Gele-gele and Forcados gave testimonies on the plight of their people, the level of damages and how it has affected the communities. They stated that the pollution in their communities have destroyed their lands and water, causing ailments that have reduced the life span of the people.

The Executive Director of ERA/FoEN, Barr. Chima Williams assured the communities that they are in full support and will join in the fight to hold the oil and gas companies accountable for their activities against the people.



While stating some strategies that should be adhered to in case of litigation, he however urged the community representatives to gather concrete information and evidence, and to collaborate within themselves to mitigate against the divide and rule tactics of the oil multinationals.

On her part, the President of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) in Edo State, Barr. Violet Olumese stated that the rights to safe environment, education, healthcare and healthy living are right backed by the constitution, of which the people in the affected communities are being deprived of.

She added that any issue affecting community women is an interest point for FIDA, assuring the communities and CODAF of their support.

The community representatives were instructed to gather relevant documents, information and evidence to commence action plans.

## **WEBINAR/TRAINING ON HUMAN AND ECOLOGICAL RIGHTS**

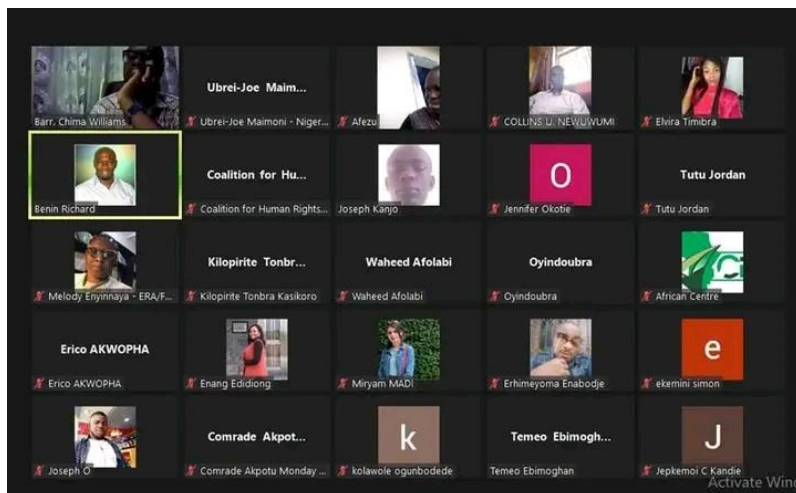
In promoting the efforts of human and environmental rights defense in the Niger Delta oil and gas producing communities, Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF) in collaboration with CHRD and ERA/FoEN organized a webinar on May 23, 2023 on Zoom.

The webinar which was organized to examine the human rights abuses caused by oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta, had over 30 participants in attendance, including community representatives, media representative, civil society organizations and legal practitioners in attendance.

Speaking at the meeting, the Executive Director of Environmental Rights Action, **Barr. Chima Williams** spoke on " Trials of Human and Ecological Rights abuses in the Niger Delta" and steps to be taken to achieve successful legal actions against oil multinationals who have defaulted on the required standards of operation.

According to him, the human ecological rights abuses against oil producing communities is an infringement of the laid down standards of operation agreed upon by the oil companies before the commencement of their operations.

Also speaking, **Tonbra Kasikoro Kilopirete**, Executive Director, Women Initiative for Values Empowerment and Sustainability International (WIVES) said the people of the riverine needs enlightenment as many of them do not know their rights, thereby accepting human rights abuses as a normal thing.



On her part, the Program Officer of CODAF, **Elvira Jordan** stated that Odimodi and other oil host communities have been put through untold hardship as their rights to a safe and healthy environment have been infringed upon, due to oil spills and chemical waste damages that have affected the lands and waters in these areas. She further stated that these host communities are at the risk of extinction if their environment is not restored.

Highlighting the interventions of CODAF in Odimodi and other oil producing communities in the area, she also revealed that CODAF in collaboration with Environmental Rights Action/ Friends Of The Earth Nigeria and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) in Edo State are putting together legal actions against oil multinationals on the human rights abuses against Odimodi, Gele-gele, Forcados and other communities that have keyed into the initiative.

She called on civil society organizations, media organizations and legal practitioners to key into the initiative and support the fight for the restoration of the rights of host communities in the Niger Delta.

## **RIVERSIDE ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGN TO CELEBRATE WORLD ENVIRONMENT/ WORLD OCEAN DAY**

In commemoration of the World Environment Day and World ocean Day, Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF) also known as Rural Community Empowerment Initiative (RUCEI) has drawn attention to the dangers of plastic waste and its effect on the environment.

The Executive Director of CODAF, **Richard Benin** stated this during a Riverside Action and Environmental Campaign in Forcados and Odimodi communities in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State, to mark World Environment Day and World Ocean Day.



Mr. Benin explained that plastic waste is growing to be one of the most disturbing issues bedeviling our planet as of today, as these products contains chemicals that are harmful to the environment and the people. He further stressed that, of the 450 million tones of plastics produced annually around the globe, only 9% is recycled and a sizeable amount of the remaining un-recycled ones find their way into our rivers and oceans which on the other hand have negative impacts on the ecosystems. He said it is important for individuals, cooperate organizations, CSOs, governments at all levels to come together to fight this menace and bequeath an environment in a better condition to our children, as we owe them that.



In his conversations with the people of Forcados and Odimodi communities respectively, he admonished the people to completely avoid or reduce the use of plastic to save their environment and to save mother earth. Speaking further, Mr. Benin, used the opportunity to call on the government to adopt and implement a comprehensive Zero waste plan that will address all forms of waste at the source of generation across all value chain and ban all single use plastics.



Also speaking at both communities, the Executive Director of African Center for Environmental and Rural Development, **Nowho Fred** who partnered with CODAF on the environmental day action, stated that World Environmental Day is not just celebrated but a reminder that we need to pay attention to the environment, to save the earth for future generations.



On her part, the Executive Director of Neferok Development Initiative, Nefertiti Ayo Okotie exposed that plastic waste accounts for 85% of Marine waste as about 11 Million metric tons of plastic goes into our ocean annually and is estimated to triple over the next 20 years. She advised that if we must survive staying on planet earth, then we must all join in the fight against plastic pollution.



Meanwhile, the people of Forcados and Odimodi have applauded the visit of CODAF and other partner organizations and the environmental messages that were brought to them.

While discussing on the Environmental issues affecting the communities, the people of Forcados lamented that they have been neglected and long forgotten by the government and oil multinationals, despite the cries of crude oil spillages and flooding that is ravaging the community.

## **VOICES OF THE PEOPLE – (SUCCESS STORIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS)**

The women of Odimodi have applauded the advocacy and intervention of CODAF in Odimodi, as the efforts made have drawn the attention of Shell to their community.

The women spoke during CODAF's Riverside action and Environmental campaign to celebrate World Environment and World Ocean Day. They expressed their gratitude testified that after the visit of CODAF in January 2023 and the advocacy efforts made, Shell had introduced nine (9) new scholarship slots for the community and brought medical teams to examine and attend to the medical needs of the people.

While they appreciated the efforts of Shell, they however appealed that rather than bringing occasional medical teams to the community, a standard hospital with trained doctors should be established permanently in Odimodi to attend to emergencies and other unforeseen medical needs of the people.

**Juliet Egbele** --- After you (CODAF) came to our community a few months ago. we talked about our problems and scholarship. Before we used to have 15 to 25 scholarships but we don't know what happened, it reduced to 3 and that was a problem within the community. After you (CODAF) visited our community, they (Shell) brought 9 new scholarships for us. Things are coming up in Odimodi. Even our healthcare program, Shell sent medical teams two weeks ago to take care of everyone, adults, children, pregnant women, giving medications. They promised to come back with equipments to do surgeries. These are some changes we have seen after you (CODAF) left our community the last time.



**Monday Alagoa** --- We thank you very much. What you did for us has brought good things to our community. They brought 9 scholarships and also brought doctors to treat us. But when these doctors come to treat us, they will return to where they came from and we do not know when next they will return, maybe months maybe years. There are people who will fall sick within this period. So what we want is for them to build a hospital in our community with doctors that will be permanent in Odimodi.



**Juliana Ekimbo** --- What we have seen now is like an open door for us. We thank you for coming to help us. We have seen different things happening in our community since. We want you to continue your good work. We believe that if you continue, more good things will happen in our community. We thank Shell for what they have done so far. We want them to bring adult education for those who want to go to school. We also want them to do our roads and to give us loans and grants to help us.

**Esther Ingo** --- When we have problems in Odimodi and we need doctors, we have to travel to Ogula before we can see good doctors and it is not good. We want shell to bring a hospital but we also need good doctors that will be on standby in Odimodi so that we will not run helter skelter. We need our own permanent and reliable doctors.

# PHOTO STORY

## COURTESY VISIT TO THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF ODIMODI



## VILLAGE SQUARE MEETING IN ODIMODI



## CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING



## MEDIA TOUR



# LEGAL STRATEGY MEETING



# WORLD ENVIRONMENT/OCEAN DAY IN FORCADOS



## WORLD ENVIRONMENT/OCEAN DAY IN ODIMODI



**Community Development Advocacy, CODAF** (also known as Rural Community Empowerment Initiative) 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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