

Persistent oil spillage at Bodo Creek; *unprecedented impacts on ecosystem stability, biodiversity and food security of Ogoni communities.*

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Report Issued By

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INTRODUCTION:

In the history of oil production in Nigeria, Gokana Local Government Area in Rivers State is very important. While oil was first struck in commercial quantity in 1956 at Oloibiri town in the present day Bayelsa State, the second discovery of oil in commercial volume was at Bomu in 1958 – the Bomu oil field contributed major supply to the first shipment of oil from Nigeria in 1958. Bomu is an Ogoni town administratively located in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State. There are 96 oil wells connected to 5 flow stations in Ogoni operated by the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC – a subsidiary of the Royal Dutch Shell). Two of the Ogoni flow stations code-named Bomu and Bodo West are situated in Gokana. Presence of these facilities including numerous Trans-Niger pipelines that criss-cross Gokana land and seascape render the area highly vulnerable to oil spills. Generally, oil spillages occur almost daily in Nigeria's Niger Delta- the country's hub of oil and gas production. Between 1979 – 1997, the Nigerian Petroleum Industry experienced 5334 cases of oil spillage resulting in the discharge of 2.8 million barrels of oil into the land, swamps, estuaries and coastal waters¹. Sometimes petroleum spillage in the delta is under reported, not reported at all or rated minor without minimum post-spill containment, recovery and remediation responses².

Notwithstanding the temporary suspension of oil exploration and exploitation operations in Ogoni since the early 1990s to date*, the area is still prone to incessant crude oil spillages.

¹ Dublin-Green, W.F., Nwankwo, J.N. and Irechukwu, D.O. (1998). Effective regulation and management of HSE issues in the petroleum industry. SPE International Conference on Health, Safety and Environment in oil and gas exploration and production, Caracas, Venezeula, 7 – 10 June, 1998. paper No. SPE 40/26.

² Shell's shell in Ogoni land; killing the environment and impoverishing the people. www.cehrd.org

* In1990, Ken Saro-Wiwa mobilized the people of the six kingdoms that make up Ogoni to form the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). A year later, MOSOP presented the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the federal government of Nigeria, which was blatantly ignored. The Ogoni took to the street on January 4, 1993 to protest government's insensitivity to their demands as outlined in the bill of rights, and few months later MOSOP issued a quit notice to SPDC. Since April 1993 SPDC had not return to her oil fields in Ogoniland. Saro-Wawa was hanged by the Nigerian government on November 10, 1995, on trumped-up charges. Recently (5 June, 2008), Nigeria's president, Umaru Musa Yar'dua announced the official withdrawal of SPDC's licence to operate in Ogoni with effect from December. According to the president, the licence will be issued to another firm acceptable to the Ogoni.

A case in point is the ongoing spillage from SPDC 28" Bomu-Bonny pipeline traversing Bodo Creek. It will be recall that Gokana littoral communities also suffered extensive oil spills from August 25 – September 3, 2003².

OILING AND OILING AGAIN!

On June 16, 2008 oil spilled at SPDC Well 18 situated at Kpor, the headquarters of Gokana local government area. SPDC responded by deploying Dok Liaison Agency*, one of its local contracting firms to contain the spilling oil from extensive spreading. Foot workers of Dok Liaison dug four 2x2x2m ponds along the tract that the oozing oil flows. Accumulated oil in the dugout pits was never scoop away. Consequently, an overnight post-spill/containment rainfall led to overflow of the ditches. The hitherto ‘contained’ oil drained in runoff to a 1m-wide runnel which empties into Goi brackishwater creek. And tidal fluxes aided the spread of the oil to littoral communities in the neighbourhood.

Following the Well 18 spillage described above, another ongoing spill within Bodo Creek, begun. According to local sources, the Bodo Creek oil spillage started since August 28, 2008 and the spilling continues as at the time of filing this report. Field investigation conducted by CEHRD reveals that the source of the oiling is an impaired spot along the 28" Bomu-Bonny pipeline within Bodo creek. The pipeline is a Trans-Niger trunkline running from the hinterlands through Gokana, having interconnections with the Bodo manifold ashore and Bodo West flow station in the mangrove swampland of Bodo Creek, and link to Bonny terminal. But CEHRD could not confirm precisely the cause of the spillage; the cause remains hazy as at the time of compiling this report. However, local fisherfolks interviewed in Bodo gave divergent speculations.

* Most local contractors to the transnational oil corporations in Nigeria are quacks with no requisite skill and facilities to carry out minimum conventional oil containment and remediation tasks.

One source alleges that construction activities associated with the Bodo-Bonny road and bridges project might have fractured the pipeline*. In contrast, another view holds that the spillage is due to equipment failure (pipe rupture); many oil pipelines in the Niger Delta are aged and have outlived their shelf span. It is worthwhile to comment about a criminal oil economy that has crop up in Ogoni involving local contractors and SPDC officials. “Local contractors sponsor miscreants to vandalize SPDC pipeline (usually in inland areas) and set aflame oil contain in the pipe. This results in thick-soot (smoke) funneling into the sky that is noticeable from afar. Presence of the flares is reported to SPDC#. The latter then engages one of its local contractors (most likely the initiator of the flame) from the affected area to extinguish the fire and remediate the impacted area. The contractor in turn pays post-job bribe called ‘kick-back’ to SPDC staff that facilitated the contract award”.

ECOLOGICAL COSTS!

Tidal regimes have caused wide-spread distribution of oil scum to the length and breadth of Bodo Creek and the network of adjoining Creeks. Toxicity of the oil has resulted in mortal damages to food species that support the protein needs of the people. These include Oyster (*Crassostrea gasar*), bloody cockle (*Anadara senilis*), Swimming Crab (*Callinectis* spp), fiddler crab (*Uca tangeri*), mangrove hairy crab (*Gionopsis Pelli*), mudskipper (*Periopthalmus papilio*), Mulletts (*Mugil cephalus*, *Liza* spp), Snapper (*Lutjanus* spp), etc. Carcasses of these and other species are visibly washed ashore or found afloat in the creek waters and on attached substrates. Marginal macrophytes are badly affected too. Mangroves (mostly red mangrove, *Rhizophora* spp and white mangrove, *Avicennia germinas*) dominate the creek floristic community. These are tainted and have started showing signs of death and defoliation; some mangrove stands are dead already.

*Bodo-Bonny road is a federal government road project awarded in 2003 by the Obasanjo administration. The road, if completed, will link Bodo mainland to Bonny Island. The road comes under category A projects in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act No. 86 of 1992 which require mandatory EIA studies before commencement. This (EIA) was skipped and several negative impacts of the road on the people and biophysical environment of Bodo have started manifesting. These include unprecedented flooding of farmlands, riverbank erosion and land sliding due to reckless sand dredging, blockage of traditional road tracts and creek channels, etc.

SPDC does not have direct access to her oil fields in Ogoni since it pulled out of the area in 1993. Surveillance of SPDC facilities and sundry maintenance jobs is giving to local contractors.

At present however, the actual lethal and sublethal (i.e. both short and long term) impacts of the spillage cannot be estimated. Secondly, the spill continues and the effects on the biophysical environment will increase in several folds as the oil exudation protracts.

INEVITABLE CONCERNS!

Part of Bodo Creek affected by the 2003² spill had not fully recovered via natural weathering processes when the ongoing spill incident started*. The people of Bodo and other Gokana littoral communities are predominantly farmers and fishers. Mangroves and other resources deliverable from the seascape are to the people what taxes are to the governments. Mangroves provide the people with several goods and ecosystem services. The high caloric fuel woods from mangroves support the domestic energy needs of the people. Naturally, mangroves are productive ecosystems and host extra-ordinary biodiversity; most commercial fish stocks live their larval stages in the mangrove. Given the overwhelming dependency of Gokana people's livelihood on mangrove and artisanal fisheries, it is safe to infer that the spillage will largely undermine food security in the locality. Most importantly, nearly two months have past since the oil spill started and oil is still gushing from the impaired pipeline. It is technically difficult for CEHRD to do an approximation of volume of oil that has spewed, and still oozing into the creek environment to qualify the spillage minor, medium or major[#]. However, there can be little doubt that it is one of the worst spillages ever witnessed in Ogoni (*our personal observation*). The short and long term impacts arising from the current spill incident at Bodo Creek might override the historic and highly referenced Bomu-11 oil well blowout**.

*Also affected is a mangrove swampland that CEHRD remediated and revegetated between 2005 and 2006. See www.cehrd.org.

[#] Spillages are categorized according to quantity spilled and the type of environment impacted. In brackishwaters which Bodo Creek belongs, less than 25 barrels is rated minor; between 25-250 barrels medium; and over 250 barrels is consider major.

** On July 11, 1970 SPDC Bomu-11 oil well blew out, spilling oil over 607 hectares of farmlands.

Wetlands especially mangrove creeks and creeklets are generally sensitive environments. This coupled with tidal spreading of the oil and pumping into sediments; the uninterrupted outpouring of oil for several weeks now and no intervention measures yet to be initiated will worsen the extent and longevity of impacts on ecosystem stability and biota of Bodo and its neighbourhood.

Moreover, there are no known instances in Nigeria whereby oil polluted site had been fully remediated and restored by the oil corporations; most polluted environments are neglected to the mercy of slow process of natural recovery that takes several years to accomplish. Even in terrestrial environments that remediation is conventionally cheaper and easy, in the Nigerian situation, it is a luxury that is 'impossible'. For example, the Ejamah-Ebubu (Eleme in Ogoni) oil spill incident of 1970 remains unclean till date (i.e. 37 years after)³. Besides deliberate negligence, corporate corruption and penchant to cut-corners hinder remediation programmes in the Nigerian oil industry.

Remediation contracts are awarded to quacks in the disguise of local content patronage. The contractors simply transport topsoil from elsewhere to mask contaminated spill site(s)! Spurred by no commitment and the lack of meticulous inspectorate on the part of the oil firms, local contractors always smile to their banks having paid the usual 'Kick-back' for jobs not-well-done.

3. Hart, A.I., Amah, E. and Zabbey, N. (2007). Biocenosis of planktonic flora in a 36 years old crude oil polluted freshwater pond in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *African Journal of Zoology and Environmental Biology* 9: 63-69 www.unportjournals.com/ajazeb

RECOMMENDATIONS:

CEHRD* recommends as follows:

- (1) SPDC should mobilize its counter spill personnel to the affected site to repair the impaired pipeline and possibly recover floating oil scum without delay.
- (2) The Federal and State Ministries of Environment and the Department of Petroleum Resources should inspect the contaminated site and commission an independent inquiry to unravel the cause(s) of the spillage.
- (3) There is urgent need to do thorough post spill assessment of the environmental and social impacts of the spillage, and carry out comprehensive remediation in the affected area.
- (4) Oil companies should as a matter of corporate policy evolve effective contingency measures to counter oil spill incident(s) in the Niger Delta.

* This report was researched and prepared by Nenibarini Zabbey, Head of Environment and Conservation Programme, CEHRD

ABOUT CEHRD

The Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) is a non-profit organization based in the Ogale-Nchia community in the Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It was founded on August 15, 1999 as the Niger Delta Project for Environment, Human Rights and Development (NDPEHRD) and re-incorporated under its new name CEHRD in 2005 following its board decision. CEHRD's work is to forge a common link with the rural Niger Delta communities primarily, through research, outreaches, participatory trainings, campaigns and advocacy on the problems confronting them. Equipping them with the basic knowledge of their situation and encouraging them to non-violently address the issues themselves.