

Shell, clean up your mess in the Niger Delta!

Friends of the Earth Germany and civil society from around the world call on Shell to carry out the mandatory clean-up of the Niger Delta.

5th August 2013

Shell, the multinational oil company, has been extracting oil from the Niger Delta for decades. In that time, an area the size of Portugal has been polluted. The prime source of this pollution is leaks from dilapidated pipelines and equipment.

Two years ago, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) published a report which detailed the extent of oil pollution in Nigeria and called for Shell to clean up degraded land. Now, two years on, little has been done to improve the situation in the Niger Delta.

Together with Friends of the Earth Nigeria (Environmental Rights Action), Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie) and Friends of the Earth Europe, Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) campaign to put a stop to oil pollution in Nigeria, and demand that Shell takes responsibility for the damage it has caused.



Source: BBC news.uk.co, 2011

Pre-2011: Shell, oil, pollution and the Niger Delta

For over 50 years, Shell Petroleum Development Company Nigeria Limited has neglected to adhere to established standards for oil drilling and has destroyed valuable ecosystems in the Niger Delta, in particular in Ogoniland.

Oil leaks and oil well fires have destroyed the environment. The Ogoni people, overwhelmingly dependent on fishing and farming, are fighting for their livelihoods and their health. The result is high levels of unemployment and poverty. Many have been forced to abandon their homeland in search of a living in other parts of Nigeria.

'there is a serious threat to public health, yet so far no clean-up operation has been carried out' – Henrik Slotter, UNEP, 2013

The Ogoni have appealed for help, including a recent court case in The Hague. In 2011, UNEP, no longer able to turn a blind eye to the ecological and social catastrophe playing-out in Ogoniland, carried out a comprehensive scientific study into the consequences of oil drilling – commissioned by the Nigerian government and paid for by Shell. The study was based on soil and water samples from 200 areas polluted by oil and 800 contaminated oil wells.

UNEP revealed that the damage was far more extreme than previously estimated and recommended measures for the renaturalisation of the region.

'in many areas, the surface had been covered in a crust of asphalt and burnt earth for several decades. All of the rivers were contaminated by old oil, which was floating on the surface' – Henrik Slotter, UNEP, 2013



A boy stands by a river bed contaminated by oil near his home of Goi. © Marten van Dijk, Milieudefensie

Post-2011: UNEP recommendations

UNEP states that a clean-up and regeneration of the region is possible, but could take up to 30 years. Any further enlargement of the contaminated areas must be stopped immediately.

Key emergency measures were identified to deal with contaminated drinking water, including:

- Testing bodies of water for contamination by hydrocarbons and benzene
- Information campaigns and education of the population as to the quality of the drinking water
- The clear marking of sources of clean drinking water through signs, or provision of adequate alternatives

An urgent clean-up must be carried out in the following areas:

- Flowing waters, mangroves, and topsoil
- Ground water, and lower layers of soil
- Swamps, and surface waters

Health:

UNEP recommends, furthermore, that the health of the population be checked regularly and that illnesses and diseases be treated promptly.

The report contains draft plans for government institutions and those independent of Shell for monitoring the clean-up measures:

- Integrated Contaminated Soil Management Centre Ogoniland
- Centre of Excellence for Environmental Restoration
- Environmental Restoration Authority

It recommended that an Environmental Restoration Fund for Ogoniland be set up to control financing and manage donated funds. In addition, UNEP demanded that 1 billion USD be provided by Shell and the Nigerian government as seed capital.

The implementation of the UNEP report is of urgent necessity, so that the Ogoni can once again go about their work, free from danger, and feed themselves. Furthermore there is an urgent need for improved provision of health services in the region, so that the people who are already suffering from the short and long-term effects of the pollution can be treated.



Eric Dooh at home in Goi village, Ogoniland, showing oil pollution © Marten van Dijk, Milieudefensie

What has been done so far?

Not one of the measures recommended in the report have been implemented to date.

The drinking water in ten communities in Ogoniland remains heavily polluted. One example is the community of Nisisioken Ogala, where the families living there draw their water from a well polluted with cancer-causing benzene. The benzene value measured in that well exceeds the WHO recommended maximum by 900 times.

The Hydrocarbon Pollution Restoration Project (HYPREP) has been founded, an institution to oversee clean-up measures. According to a Nigerian government statement from July 2012, this institution should move the implementation of the report's recommendations forward and monitor activities. So far, however, it has not undertaken any steps to fulfil its mission. Instead it has been tasked with monitoring the oil pipelines.

UNEP criticised the method used by Shell, the Remediation by Enhanced Natural Attenuation (RENA), in which contaminated soil is treated with a (legally prohibited) fertiliser, in order to accelerate the degradation of the oil. This does not lead to a fundamental clean-up of the region.

The seed capital of 1 billion USD has so far not been provided.

Demands to Shell

BUND and Friends of the Earth groups demand the following:

1. Shell, other oil companies, and the Nigerian government pay the initial seed capital of 1 billion USD immediately. The clean-up and regeneration of the individual areas must begin immediately.
2. Shell Petroleum Development Company Nig. Ltd. must begin to disassemble its inactive oil production facilities in Ogoniland, in accordance with the measures recommended by UNEP, renovate the active facilities to bring them up to the current technical standard, and undertake regular maintenance work to prevent further oil leaks in future.
3. Should an oil leak occur, it must be stopped immediately, the environment be cleaned and returned to its original state. The local population must be informed, protected and compensated.
4. Shell must begin directly to clean the surface of all polluted areas of land in Ogoniland and guarantee that these be cleaned and regenerated within the five-year period stipulated by the UNEP report. Two years have already passed without any steps being taken.
5. The government must set up a reservoir to supply the communities in Ogoniland who have no access to clean drinking water.
6. The government must set up a medical station straight away, so that the health of the population in the area can be checked regularly and appropriate treatment be provided.
7. The parent company of Petroleum Development Company Nig. Ltd., Royal Dutch Shell Plc (RDS), which oversees work carried out by Shell, should support Shell by providing financing and expertise, to ensure that the required clean-up in Ogoniland is carried out.
8. All Ogoni, the Nigerian public, all Friends of the Earth groups, and the organs of the United Nations must unite in exerting pressure on Shell and the Nigerian government to ensure the implementation of the UNEP report within an appropriate period of time.

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Most of the information in this evaluation of the current situation in Ogoniland was collated with the help of Chima Williams from Environmental Rights Action (Friends of the Earth Nigeria).

Further additional information was sourced from the UNEP report:
http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/OEA/UNEP_OEA_ES.pdf

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