

OIL EXPLOITATION IN Ogoniland AND THE DILEMMA OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Ogoni was in the world center stage as a result of the hanging of the 'Ogoni 9' in 1995 and consequent expulsion of Nigeria from Commonwealth of Nations due to human right abuse. The cause of the imbroglio was oil exploitation and environmental degradation, nonchalant attitude of the Oil Company - Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and the perceived marginalisation by the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This paper looks at Oil exploration and exploitation in Ogoniland, and environmental degradation occasioned by these activities. Recommendation is made with reference to the Niger-Delta Regional Development Plan of the Federal Republic of Nigeria launched in March 2007.

Introduction

The Ogoni is one of more than 20 ethnic groups living in the 70,000 sq kilometer Niger-Delta Oil Producing Area. They are a distinct ethnic group inhabiting the coastal plain to the northeast of the Niger-Delta.

Their population put at 500,000, is distributed in 3 Local Governments Areas which include Khana, Tai and Gokana and they inhabit 82 communities in Rivers State.

The people of Ogoni are mainly farmers and fishermen. It is believed by the Ogoni that farming is life. As put by Sira Ghana from Bera in an interview with Guardian (April 4, 2000), "Every; Ogoni person is a farmer. What else is there? Whatever job you do you must farm". Some of them are petty traders because of the influx of immigrant oil workers into Ogoniland.

According to Ogoni Bill of Right (1990), Shell BP (now Shell Petroleum Development Company) started Oil Prospecting and Production in Ogoniland in 1958. Oil was first discovered in Ogoniland in Okorokoro and until May 1993 when production stopped, Shell had five major Oil Fields in Ogoniland with 96 Oil Wells hooked to 5 flow stations.

The Ogoni environment was pristine before the incursion of the Shell Bp in 1958 and since then it has been a case of flagrant abuse of the ecology and the ecosystem. Vanguard Daily of 29th September (1996), gave a clear picture of the situation "that with the oil activities in Ogoni, the once beautiful countryside is no more a source of fresh air and green vegetation. All one sees and feels around is death. Death is everywhere in Ogoniland. Ogoni languages are dying, Ogoni culture is dying, fishes and animals are dying."

Jesse Jackson, a United States envoy for African and a Human Right Activist on his visit to Ogoni as reported by Punch Daily of 11th March 1999 was overwhelmed by the level of environmental degradation. He was moved with pity when he saw the state of affairs in Ogoniland.

A group of East Timorians on fact finding mission on Oil Activities in Nigeria led by Joao Samento after touring some Oil Bearing Communities of Finima, Bonny and Ogoni stated. "We are shocked by the level of environmental devastation in areas visited."

Shell's oil production activities in Ogoniland have impacted disastrously on the environment of Ogoniland degrading it to the detriment of the fauna, flora and humans inhabiting the environment.

This paper will discuss the impact of oil activities on Ogoni environment under the following headings:

- i. Oil Exploitation and Soil Degradation in Ogoniland,
- ii. Oil Activities and Water Pollution in Ogoniland, and
- iii. Gas Flaring and Air pollution in Ogoniland.

Oil Activities and Soil Degradation in Ogoni Land

The Ogoni Land has suffered untold degradation, devastation and has been badly abused since the inception of Oil Prospecting and Production in the area in 1958.

All the operations involved in the quest for this hydrocarbon have one or more negative effects on the soil. The first stage, which is seismic survey, involves clearing paths and felling of cash crops, forest trees, and forest down covers. The clearing of these forest covers exposes the soil to all forms of erosion thereby reducing the soil productive capacity. In addition, the seismic operation involves the use of explosives on the earth, and this could stimulate tremor on the earth. Coastal erosion is also exacerbated by vibration caused by the use of these explosives. Wildlives in Ogoni forest have migrated because of the perceived or real threat to their existence due to explosions.

According to Nwankwo (1998), all phases of Oil Production Process produce environmental impact of grave consequences. In the course of Oil Exploration, drill cuttings and drill mud are used; they contain constituents such as barites and bentonitic clays, which stunt plant growth when dropped on the soil.

Aworawo (2000), corroborated this, that Oil Process involves activities such as drill cutting, drill mud and fluids, which pollute the soil and cause infertility.

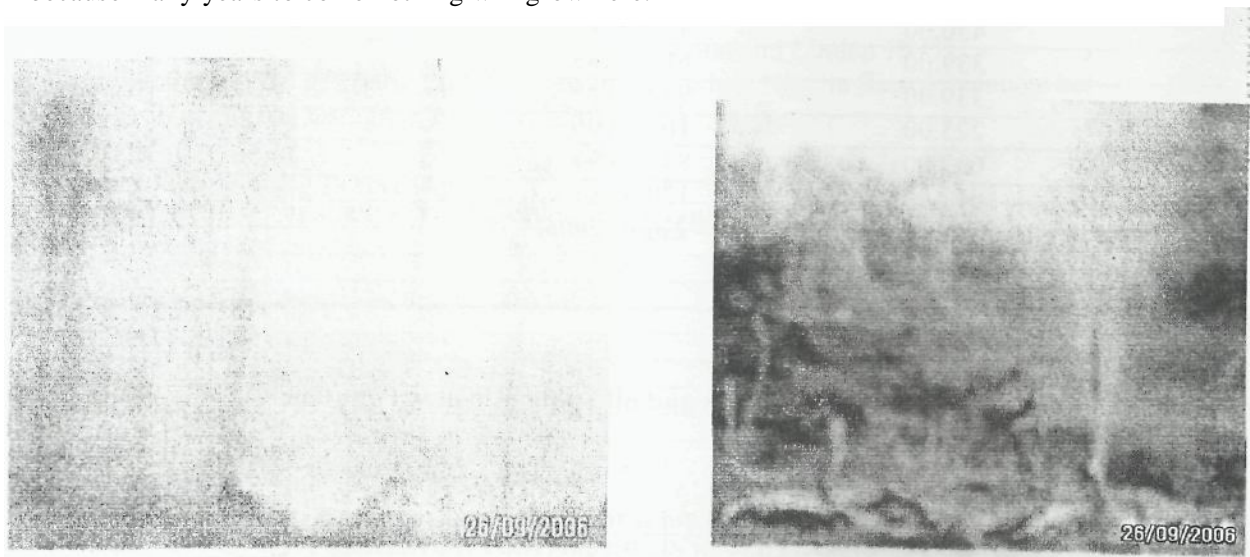
According to Nigeriabrief (1995), Shell and the Ogoni issue a Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) publication, between 1985 and 1993 there were 87 cases of Oil Spillage in Ogoni. Between 1994 and 1995 another 17 cases were recorded. The Yorla oil spill which occurred on April 26th 2001 till May 7 2001 remains the most devastating spillage recorded in the history of Ogoni and Oil Activities.

The Yorla spillage was followed by fire which consumed crops, economic trees, and newly planted beds of cassava, pineapple, medicinal herbs and others in which 1000 hectares of farmland were a stretch of blackness. The remains of burnt animal and grotesque looking remains of plants and trees were a reminder of the scorching on the stretch of the land. (Guardian, 26th May 2001). Plates A and B show land degradation resulting from oil well fire in Ogoni.

Plates Showing: Land degradation in Ogoniland resulting from Oil Well Fire

Oil spillage affects all life kind in the environment. The micro and macro flora and fauna will be exterminated;

Labari (2000) states thus, "whenever the thing occurs, (spillage), we only remove our premature yams tubers because many years to come nothing will grow here."



Oil Activities In Ogoni Land and Water Pollution

Oil production has left Ogoni waters heavily polluted. The hitherto pristine streams and rivers of Ogoni now symbolize filth.

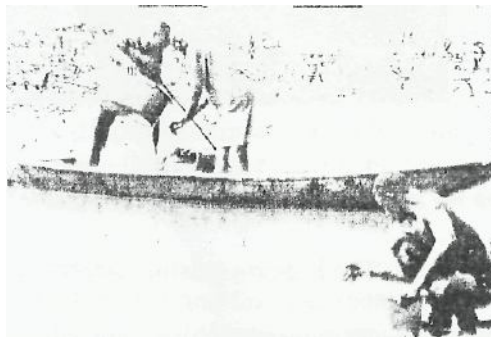
Water is naturally associated with oil in the reservoir. This water, which is usually separated from oil at the terminal station before storage and export, contain salts and traces of heavy metals. When such separated oil water is discharged into the water body, it increases the salinity of the water and it also raises the turbidity.

However, the major threat to water purity is the occurrence of spillages. Table I shows oil spill cases between 1976 and 2001.

Table 1: Oil Spill Data in Nigeria (1976 - 2001)

YEAR OF SPILL	NUMBER (BBLs)	NET VOLUME (BBLs)	QUANTITY RECOVERED
1976	128.00	26,157.00	-
1977	104.00	32,879.00	-
1978	154.00	489,294.00	-
1979	157.00	694,170.00	-
1980	241.00	600,511.00	-
1981	238.00	42,722.00	-
1982	252.00	42,841.00	-
1983	173.00	48,351.30	-
1984	151.00	40,209.00	-
1985	187.00	11,876.60	-
1986	155.00	12,905.00	-
1987	129.00	31,866.00	-
1988	208.00	9,172.00	-
1989	195.00 ;	7,628.16	-
1990	160.00	14,940.82	1,883.42
1991	201.00	106,827.98	2,286.35
1992	378.00	51,187.96	1,286.35
1993	428.00	9,752.22	2,357.81
1994	515.00	30,282.67	688.85
1995	417.00-	- 6-3,677.17	3,110.02
1996	430.00	46,353.12	806.91
1997	339.00	81,727.85	6,196.81
1998	339.00	99,885.35	5,934.02
1999	225.00	16,903.96	294.00
2000	637.00	84,071.91	1,456.85
2001 (Source: Department of Petroleum Resources - Lagos 2006)	412.00	120,976.16	76.90

The Plates C and D below Show oil spill Sites and oil Spillage Water Pollution



Scooping oil from wafer surface



Pipeline rupture and oil quashing

Though Shell has stopped operation in Ogoni Land since 1993, yet spillages occur as a result of corrosion and rupture of existing pipelines and flow lines.

There was a spillage in Yorla oil field in 2005 as reported by Punch Daily of September 8 2005. On March 2, 2006 this was a caption in Punch Daily "Odili urges Shell to end spills in Ogoniland." While Punch Daily of September 26 2006 caption read thus: "Shell battles Yorla well fire, reassures Ogoni."

When oil from spills are washed into the rivers and streams they wreck the greatest havoc on short and long term basis involving:

1. Surface and ground water quality deterioration in terms of potability, aesthetic, and recreation. (ii) Destruction or reduction of fish life and the fisheries production of the water, (iii) Destruction by acute and sub-lethal toxicity of the acquit flora and fauna especially the plankton which are first and initial target of spill on water. (NEST, 1991)

There have been many cases of Oil spill and its attendant impact on water pollution in Ogoniland. The Yorla spill according to Guardian Daily of 26 May, (2001) compounded the woes of the Ogoni by the pollution of small streams that dot the area, streams which until recently were the only sources of drinking water as pipe borne water or borehole water from non-functional water projects where they exist is a mirage.

Mene G.N. Nwilene the traditional ruler of Kpaen in Ogoni laments that; their sources of surface water have been rendered undrinkable, while his personal fishing ponds have been turned into oil ponds with fishes killed and nets damaged,

Baribo Friday, an Ogoni indigene from B-Dere in Guardian Daily of April 4, 2004, stated, "due to oil pollution even, when we dig well for drinking water, you will see crude oil particles floating on top of the water. Our lives are in great danger."

Ogoni Gas Flaring and Air Pollution

Gas produced as by-product in the course of oil production is called associated gas. This gas is flared at the flow stations. Nigeria currently ranks as the highest gas flaring country in the world. She flares 76% as against 21% in Libya, 20% Saudi Arabia, 19.0% in Iran, in Mexico 5%, in Britain 4.3%, in Algeria 4.0%, in former USSR 1.5%, etc (Motat and Linden 1995).

Tables 2 and 3 show gas flaring rates and percentage while Nigeria flare percentage between 1983 and 2006 is shown in the histogram below Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Gas Flaring Percentage

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE OF FLARED IN EACH COUNTRY
Nigeria	76
Libya	21
Saudi Arabia	20
Iran	19
Mexico	5.0
Algeria	4.0
Former USSR	1.5
USA	0.5

Source: (Motat and Linden, 1995)

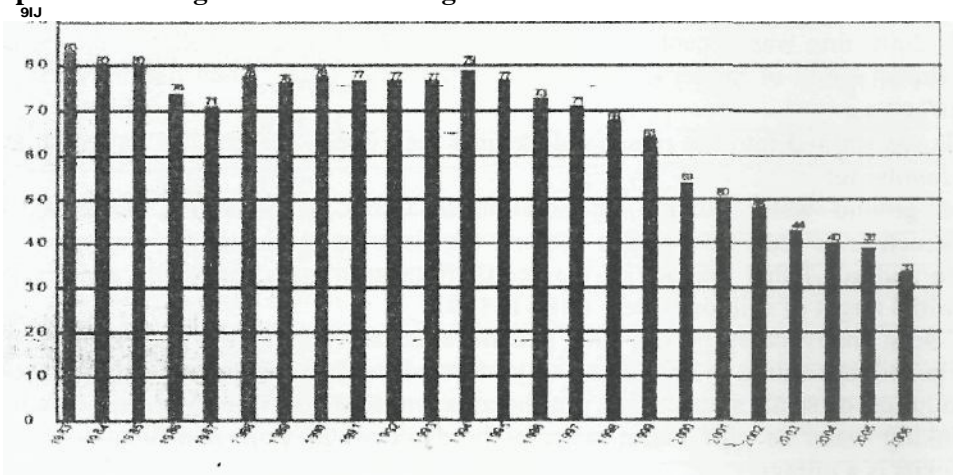
Table 3: Show Contribution of Gas Flaring of some Countries of the World

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE CONTRIBUTION IN WORLD FLARING
Nigeria	16
Russia	11
Iran	10
Algeria	6
USA	3
Denmark	3
Norway	3
UK	3
China	3
Egypt	1

Source: (Friends of the Earth 2006)

Graph 1: Percentage Gas Flared In Nigeria From 1983-2006

Graph 1: Percentage Gas Flared in Nigeria From 1983-2006



SOURCE DPR 2007

In Ogoniland, SPDC has 5 major Oil Fields; 96 Oil Wells hooked to 5 flow stations with many gas-flaring sites.

Gas flaring causes air pollution (smoke, carbon dioxide and methane). When oil gets into the flares, thick smoke is produced with soot dropping on roofs, crops, in water and on clothes hung outside as shown in Plates E and F.



PLATE E



PLATE F

The carbon dioxide and methane are green house gases causing global warming.

According to Okecha (2000), gas flaring in vast oil fields of the Niger-Delta, is responsible for considerable air pollution. In the process, sulphur oxide and oxides of nitrogen which are precursors of acid rain are emitted into the atmosphere.

Acid rains lead to skin diseases and other health problems. They also lead to the corrosion of metal roofs, acidification of potable water sources, death of aquatic life and agricultural crops.

In Ogoni, SPDC, as a display of flagrant disrespect for the laws of the land, flaring sites are literally found inside Ogoni villages and in between villages, This is against the Nigerian law, which stipulates that flaring sites should be located far from villages.

Adedipe (1999), commenting on the impact of gas flare on environment, stated that apart from the heat generated by the flares and the attendant effects on plants, animal and human beings, the not so obvious but dangerous effect of continuous light on the circadian rhythm has received little or no attention. Most biological organisms; certainly human beings require the alternation of day and night for their normal living functions. When There is continuous light, the circadian rhythm is nullified. This prevents flowering and seed set in some plants species leading to loss in food production occasioned by the accelerated phytoerological traits of bleaching (chlorosis), dehydration, desiccation, necrosis and finally death. For human beings, there are health implications

of sleeplessness, collectively called psycho-pathological disorder.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Ogoniland is today synonymous with crisis. The 1992 murder of "Ogoni four" and the later arrest of 'Ogoni nine' by Nigerian government, the trial and sentence to death by hanging of these people turned Ogoni into a cynosure, and an embattled region. The people have been dehumanized, maimed and some killed. Some of them fled to neighbouring countries and remain in refugee camps in order to escape inhuman treatment or death. Others who remained, faced intimidation and oppression.

The crime of the Ogoni is their agitation for survival. The 49 years of oil activities in Ogoniland have left the environment highly degraded. The Ogonis are mainly farmers fishermen and lumberers. Their means of livelihood have been rendered useless by oil activities; Several cases of oil spillages, flaring, gas leakages, and flow or pipeline fire have so bastardized the ecology and ecosystem of this once pristine environment.

Abe (2000), referred to Ogoni as land flowing with oil and death. The nauseating fact is that the Oil Company with the Oil Mining Lease in Ogoniland (Shell Petroleum Development Company) was more interested in what it was getting out of the Ogoni soil rather than the future of the people. In today's world the emphasis is on Sustainable Development, which literally means live and use the resources available today and be able to protect the environment for future generations. The oil activities as carried out in Ogoni environment have no thought of the survival of the present generation not to think of the future.

We will round off this paper by making the following recommendations: That the Petroleum Act of 1969 empowers the Ministry of Petroleum Resources to provide regulations to prevent environmental pollution in the petroleum sector. The Environmental Guidelines and Standard for Petroleum Industry should be given in the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) Environmental Guidelines and Standard (1991). DPR Guidelines Section 2.0 demands the Operators to carry out environmental evaluation of the existing facilities in order to determine the strategies for amelioration and restoration especially if the impact is negative. All industries and facilities generating wastes are required to comply with these regulations irrespective of which regulatory body (DPR or FME requires this. DPR and Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) in Ogoniland and elsewhere in Nigeria should enforce the regulations.

That the flaring of both associated gas and non-associated gas should be stopped. The idea of penalty should be expunged and insistence should be on zero flaring to protect the environment and reduce the acid rain in Ogoniland. Today in Ogoniland, there is zero flaring. Thanks to the crisis between SPDC and Ogoni

Though Ogoni can be said to have achieved a good level of awareness, due to long years of struggle for survival occasioned by oil activities, it is still pertinent that environment education be introduced in every primary, secondary and tertiary institution in Nigeria to create more awareness among citizens in other parts of the country.

All acts of sabotage should be discouraged. This can be achieved by involving the host communities in policing the installations.

On March 27, 2007, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Niger-Delta Regional Development Plan. The master plan is a complete document aimed at ameliorating the suffering of the people of the Niger-Delta. This is laudable blue print that must be implemented for the wellbeing of Ogoni people and the Niger Delta people in general.

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