

with aches.” Charity Seiba, 66-year old mother of 10 also said, “The same oil companies that sustain this country are killing us. This is the pain with which we have to live.”

Ikarama, a predominantly fishing and farming community of 10,000 people, also ranks as one of the most polluted communities in the Niger Delta. Settled along Taylor Creek, Ikarama is host to both the Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) and Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). Shell’s pipes that link the Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers States all pass through Ikarama. Shell’s Okordia Manifold is also situated in Ikarama.

It is assumed that by hosting big international companies like Shell, communities flourish. But the contrary happens to Ikarama, as it finds itself in a deep and dark pool of poverty. The roads have yet to be paved, as promised by the company while the lives of people are becoming worse, with their livelihoods destroyed by the frequent oil spills.

Alili Ziah is a widow with seven children. Before, she could still provide for them through fishing but now that the water has been contaminated, her family has been forced to depend on other people’s charity. “Whenever I set traps and I go to inspect, they are soaked in crude oil,” she remarked.

Like Ikarama, Imiringi has been hosting several of Shell’s gas flaring sites since 1972. The health implications arising from the open, poisonous flames are enormous. People who live nearby complain of rashes on the skin, redness of the eyes and other complications. Contamination is quite likely since women usually dry their local staple, *kpoko garri* near these gas flaring sites. Women’s reproductive health has also been affected, as seen with the rising number of cases of infertility and birth deformities.

## Shelled Fishes

by Biobele Ademe

Fishing has been badly affected by the presence of the extractive industry in this community. In those days before Shell came to our land, when our parents bail their ponds, we used to get several buckets or baskets of fishes.

The story is different these days due to the slick of oil and other chemicals from the gas flare that has continued to pollute the ponds, swamps and creeks. Even the few fishes that we manage to catch often smell of crude oil.

In most cases, one will observe varying degrees of oil slick or other shiny matter on the surface of these ponds, burrow pits and even our creek, the Kolocreek.

We often notice that the oil companies sometimes allow their waste petroleum products and even crude oil that escape from their pipelines to flow freely into our creek. Due to the several construction works, these companies disturb the routes through which the fishes swim into our ponds. These fishes are now blocked by heavy heaps of mud.

Fishes find their way into the ponds during the rainy season and when the swamps are flooded. This is also their breeding period. We have studied these patterns over the years.

The various distortions on the topography by the oil companies have adversely affected us in many ways.

Yes, in those days we used to have up to ten or more buckets of fish when we bail the ponds. We left the ponds for two years before bailing. But these days, even if one leaves it for five years before bailing, one cannot get anything from the ponds. We are thus denied a veritable source of income. We now spend our hard earned money to buy imported frozen fish.

Apart from denying us of our fishing rights, we can no longer take a bath in the river. When one dives into the creek, one comes out with an oily body.

We cannot even drink the water from the creek. Shell provided a borehole in our community but the water from the borehole is not fit for human consumption. When one fetches water and keeps it for a while, one will notice a thin silver-like colour over the surface and rusty sediments in the bucket.

*Of the oil companies operating at the Niger Delta, Shell has been deemed as the most notorious as it sanctioned human rights abuses committed by security forces at its employ...Many women still carry these scars and live in deformed bodies.*

In 2008, the Royal Dutch Shell made a US\$15.5 million settlement in a case filed by families whose members were murdered, tortured and harrassed by military forces that were protective of the company's operations.



One of the leading campaigners of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (Mosop), poet and playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa group was hanged in 1995, along with eight other people from the Ogoni ethnic group.

The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell is Nigeria's biggest oil operator, covering some 31,000 square kilometers. The company, under the name Shell D'Arcy was granted an exploration license in 1938 throughout Nigeria. After years of drilling, its first successful oil well was discovered in Oloibiri in 1956.

According to Amnesty International's report, "Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta," "Although SPDC operates within a delta system and oil infrastructure is frequently located close to farmland and waterways, few, if any, adequate protective measures have been taken by SPDC – pipelines have not been properly maintained and waste products have been released into the environment without adequate monitoring of the impact on people's lives and livelihoods. Despite legal requirements to clean-up and remediate land and water swiftly and adequately, these actions frequently do not happen."

**Sources:** Amnesty International (2009). "Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta." URL: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR44/021/2009/en/3be47dff-af1f-4c8e-b7a6-960d229644f7/afr440212009en.pdf>; British Broadcasting Corporation (9 June 2009). "Shell settles Nigeria deaths case." URL: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8090493.stm>; Shell Petroleum Development Company website. URL: [http://www.shell.com/home/content/nigeria/about\\_shell/who\\_we\\_are/history/history.html](http://www.shell.com/home/content/nigeria/about_shell/who_we_are/history/history.html)

others who fell victims but whose struggles and fates were not well-documented.

The 1990s was one of the most tumultuous times in the Niger Delta. Writer and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa roused the consciousness of the nation and the international community over the environmental injustice in Ogoniland. Following the controversial killing of four chiefs who were sympathetic to oil multinationals by irate mob of village youths, Saro-Wiwa was arrested and hanged. Military operatives paid by Shell moved into the communities with armoured tanks, guns and various weapons, shooting and killing hundreds of people including women and children, mowing down entire villages, and maiming thousands.

Today, many women still carry these scars and live in deformed bodies. One of the survivors is Promise Yibari Maapie, who had her left arm permanently withered as a result of a gun shot. Her daughter Joy also sustained damaging gun shots on her legs. "The soldiers brought pain, sorrow and hunger into my life," she told a reporter.

After the infamous Ogoni genocide, there have been several cases, including that of the Odi Massacre in 1999, where entire towns were razed down. It was a retaliatory move by the the government's troops, arising from the killing of some military men by militants.

In mid 2009, massacres and bombings happened in several villages in the Gbaramatu Kingdom in the Niger Delta. In the process, many women were killed, wounded or displaced. There were reported cases of those who gave birth in the forests and creeks while running away from the military attack. As usual, there were reports of rape by the soldiers.

Women are the foremost victims in the Niger Delta tragedy. Apart from contending with gas flares and oil spills, they also live at the