

by Agip's unregulated and insensitive drilling activities. When their cries and pleas fell on deaf ears, Cilia and her husband devised a means of safe-guarding themselves, especially their four young children. In the morning they headed to her in-laws' house and returned in the evenings to simply sleep the menace away.

But the menace caught up with Cilia, who eventually complained of body aches and nausea that left her unable to work. The family had no money that could have given her quality medical help on time. The Agip-sponsored clinic was also useless. Contrary to its press releases, the clinic was only inhabited by reptiles. Cilia was later taken to the General Hospital at Yenagoa but she succumbed in just a couple of weeks.

Cilia is just one of the several cases experienced throughout the Niger Delta

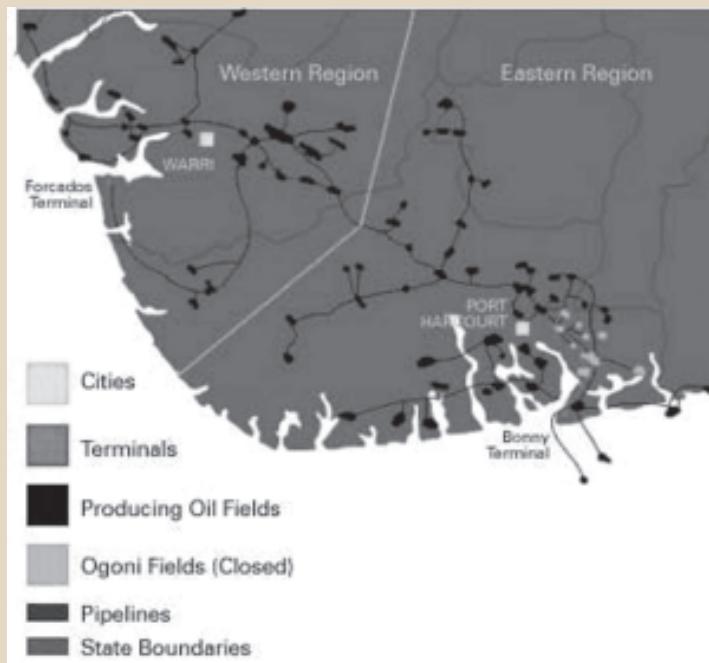
where a natural endowment of oil has become a grievous curse. The communities constantly grapple with the consequences of oil spills, gas flares and other menaces arising from unregulated explorative activities of the international oil companies.

Many women in these subsistence communities bear the burdensome task of caring for their families, protecting them from harsh pollution. The rate of cases of cancer, infertility, leukemia, bronchitis, asthma, still-births, deformed babies and other pollution-related ailments are unusually high in this region. From Ikarama to Akaraolu to Imiringi, women are bruised and dying.

As one farmer, Marthy Berebo shared, "If I am to undress before you, you will see the extent of the toll this pollution has taken on my body. The whole of my body is racked

## The Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region is a coastal community facing the Atlantic Ocean, forming approximately seven per cent of the country's land mass. It covers five main states in the region namely Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Akwa-Ibom and Cross Rivers. The Delta has been inhabited by the Ijaw, Ogoni, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ikwere, Isoko, Andoni, Ndokwa, Kwale, Efik, Ibibio and Annag peoples. Since the successful discovery of an oil well in Oloibirin in 1956, the Delta has been eyed and explored by various multinational petroleum companies. The oil industry is responsible for over 80 per cent of Nigeria's wealth. Despite such huge earnings, it is said that much of these proceed to only one per cent of the population. In addition to the environmental degradation and community displacement caused by the oil companies in the region, the corruption over oil revenues has been the source of various conflicts over the years.



**Sources:** ERA, 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> and Wikipedia (nd). "Niger Delta" URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger\\_Delta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger_Delta) and Urhobo Historical Society (nd). "Map of the Niger delta Showing Oil Fields and Pipelines." URL: [http://www.waado.org/images/Maps/in\\_oildeltamap.gif](http://www.waado.org/images/Maps/in_oildeltamap.gif)