

LOCATION: Lasuku Gbene, Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State.

Lasuku Gbene is an Ijaw community in Boma clan of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. A trip to the community from the State Capital, Yenagoa, takes about two hours by speed boat through the rivers and creeks. It is situated along the River Nun, with Peremabiri and Baberegbene as close neighbours.

The community can only be accessed by boat or aircraft. The major occupations of the people are fishing and farming. ERA monitors visited the town as a result of an oil spill that occurred in the area on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008. The spill emanated from Agip's Brass/Tededaba pipeline which passes through their land.

On arrival at Lasuku Gbene, ERA monitors established contact with the Paramount ruler, Chief Franel Christian Akenika and the Chairman of the Community Development Committee (CDC), Mr Famous Ezekiel. According to them, the community has been disheartened because of the oil spill that destroyed their farms, fish ponds and rivulets; killing fish and other animals found in the affected area.

"Since Agip passed this pipe through our land in 1974, we have not actually benefited from the company. This pipeline is known as the Brass/Tebedaba pipeline. It was in the year 2001/2002 or there about that we entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Agip. We collectively agreed that the company will execute three projects for us. These were, six classroom blocks, water project and the provision of two speed boats.

Out of these, only the speed boats issue was really fulfilled. The water project, without treatment plant worked only one day. And that was just when the contractor pumped water into the overhead tank and tried to distribute same. The pump got burnt that same day and, till date, we have not seen water from the taps. The school building too was not completed. But since we had no alternative, we are managing it. The Commissioner of Special Duties during Alamieyeseigha's administration, Hon. Ayebakuro Nelson, was the contractor. ...Chief Franel Akenika.

We suspect that this spill was caused by some arms carrying youths in the area. Although clamping was carried out ten days or so after the spill, instead of dealing with us, we observed that Agip, the Ministry of Environment and the Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee are dealing with the very militants that caused the spill. We have reports that the sum of N5.5million has already been paid to these groups. And, instead of coming to immediately clean up the spill, Agip requested the youths to set fire on the spill to conceal it. But that has caused us more loss. Trees and other farm crops have been damaged in the process Chief Fanel Akenika.

Three other persons, Mr. Famous Ezekiel, Osia Lagos and Mr. Iyetonghen Ebede confirmed the above. The first two joined the Chief to lead ERA's Field Monitor to the affected area. The General Secretary of Baberegbene was at Lasukugbene. A spokeswoman for those whose farms were affected, Mrs. Lora Nylon said, My farm has been destroyed and I don't think I can get anything from the farms this year. My crops such as cassava, cocoyam, plantain and sugar cane were all affected. I join other affected farmers to call on Agip to take up the responsibility and come to our aid.

Apart from Lora, some others who lost their farms to the flames and oil spill include: Mrs. Edienworemi Akenika, Mrs. Alice General, Mrs. Odozi Lambert, Mrs. Boma Shell, Mrs. Doris Newton, Mrs. Kalaye Newton

What ERA's field monitors observed was another sad episode where our communities are being short changed; this time around with the involvement of militants as beneficiaries. If the testimonies are true, the communities would be worse for it. This is so because whatever the militants discuss with the company would be final.

1. Agip should own up and carry out cleaning of the affected area.
2. The matter of the alleged culpability of the company and other agencies of government should be investigated.

3. A Joint Investigation Team report should come out at the end of the day and, the community should, as demanded by the industry regulations, form part of that team.

4. Agip should pay compensation to the affected community people.