

Right from my childhood I have been hearing of Shell. And now as an adult I know that Shell has not contributed anything positive towards this community as a host. Instead of getting anything from Shell we are suffering from their activities. All the Cocoyam that we planted this year have been ruined as none survived. Our mothers have suffered so much to clear their farms and plant but nothing came out from their efforts; even the fish ponds have been impacted now by the oil spill. Shell is responsible for all this -JOY DAVID Native of Owerewere Community.

Location: Along Shell's Kolo Creek/Rumuekpe Trunk line.

GPS Coordinates of Spill Point: Elev 8m, N 04° 58.066, E 006° 36.753

Highlight: Shell's response capable of causing violent conflict between Communities.

INTRODUCTION:

Owerewere Community is situated in Abua/Odual local government area of Rivers State and is one of the largest settlements in the area. Fishing, farming and some hunting activities are the main occupation of the people. The community hosts Shell's two major oil trunk lines that traverse the community lands. Before the current spill, Owerewere experienced oil spills in the 1980s.

The community can be easily accessed by road from Ahoada. Two of its neighbours are: Okporowo [an Ekpeye Community in Ahoada West LGA], Ojosi [also in Ahoada West LGA] and Eminigboko, from Abua/Odual LGA. Owerewere has a large number of unemployed youths. About 300 of them were among the former Niger Delta militants who accepted the Federal Government's amnesty and have undergone trainings in Obura, Cross Rivers State. When information reached ERA/FoEN about a recent oil spill in the community, steps were immediately initiated to confirm the incident and ascertain the state of the environment. ERA's field monitors were led by Mr. Washington Odoiyibo to meet the Youth President of Owerewere Community, Alhaji O.S.A. Omeghara, who also led the team to the community from Ahoada. After arriving the community and ERA's mission explained, some youths, elders and women volunteered to go to the spill site with ERA.

AT THE SPILL SITE:

Though the pungent smell of crude oil heralded the field monitors to the spill site from a considerable distance [even before the spread of the crude oil in the environment was seen physically], the team was surprised at what they saw when they finally arrived the spill point. Not only that the spilt black gold [crude oil] was noticed in two ditches; the points of rupture, some familiar materials such as funnels, 20 liter jerry cans and a yellow tape/thread used to mark out the spill point [caution sign]. The spill point was still bubbling, a sign that the spot has not been clamped. A small heap of mud was also noticed, used like boom to prevent the continued spread of the crude oil from the point of spill. And, because everyone was really surprised at the materials found in the environment, the youths became agitated and alert. Seeing some person along the pipeline towards Okporowo; some in yellow coverall, the youths of Owerwere decided to give them a chase, because they felt those person were doing something at the spill site and only ran when they spotted the real owners of the land coming. This follow up resulted into the seizure of 4 [four] giant Geepee tanks used by some Okporowo persons to transfer the crude oil from the spill point without the knowledge of the people of Owerwere community. What follows below are few testimonies from community folks, conclusion and demands.

TESTIMONIES FROM COMMUNITY FOLKS

" Last week I was in Port Harcourt when I received a call from our paramount ruler on information he received in connection with an oil spill in the community at the Owerwere axis of the Rumuekpe /Kolo Creek Trunk Line. When I arrived the community I gathered some youths to go to the spill site with me. When I got to the site and saw the extent, I informed the paramount ruler who immediately called the surveillance contractor and informed him, including the Chairman of the Chiefs Council. The matter was then reported to Shell officially. Since then, about a week now, we have not seen Shell officials in our community. This prompted us to reach out to ERA to see what is happening. Our major occupation here is fishing and farming with some involved in hunting. Now this crude oil spill has impacted on the environment so, you can see for yourself because it is still bubbling from the pipe. This has affected our farmlands, ponds and swamp and denied us of our means of livelihood. Now, my appeal is that Shell should come to the community to put heads together with us to see how to stop the spill and clean the impacted environment. But to my greatest surprise, on getting to the spill site today (26 October 2010) we saw a group of people running away wearing red coverall and their car parked around Okporowo. Some of our boys chased them to identify them and get related details. It is evident that this sabotage was planned by Shell to tarnish the image of my community."

From our observation now, we suspect that Shell is passing through our neighbours to access this spill point without our knowledge. The implication is that Shell is trying to make the two communities to clash violently. I have been hearing of Shell as a confusionist organization. Now they have proved that to me before the women, youths and elders of my community. We want the State and Federal Government to come to our assistance. You can see things for yourself

that we are suffering. We are a very peaceful community and even Shell can attest to that fact. We have not experienced any oil spill since the early 1980s .

As you can see these persons who ran away as we approached, they must be culpable. And that is why we see the need for Shell to engage more of our youths as special surveillance on this pipeline to secure the facility. Not long ago we intercepted some bunkers at the other end of our community and we reported to Shell but up till today Shell did nothing about it. Now they have brought this wicked act to the middle of our land. And it is unacceptable.

-ALHAJI ABDULAH O.S. OMEGHARA, Youth President of Owerewere Community

We are working for Shell as casual workers to scoop the oil. It was one man called Hapi Benneth from Ojosi Community that engaged me for this job [with others youths from my community]. It was Shell that gave him the contract. And we started this job yesterday [Monday, 25th October, 2010]. We are not the owners of the land where the spill occurred. It is owned by Owerewere Community. We told the contractor to go and see the people of Owerewere but they refused. It was this morning they [Shell contractors] told me that there is somebody with a gun at that side, that I should go and invite the person to come and settle with them. When I went, I didn't see anybody as described. As I came back, up till now I have not seen any of the Shell people again.

-CHIMADU ARARUOLO [Caught scooping the oil from Okporowo]

When we chased those people who ran as they saw us coming to the spill site and caught up with them, we asked them several questions. They even gave us the phone number of the contractor and when we called him he said we should come and meet him in one hotel, that he will settle us there. But we said we won't go, he should come and talk to us in our community. The youths from a neighbouring community that were engaged to do the scooping of oil told us that they are working night and day, even with torchlight. They showed us some of the materials like helmet, coverall and rain boots Shell provided for them to do the work. There were provided about 10 giant Geepee tanks and we have seized four of them .

-Esema Amawo, Native of Owerewere Community

Right from my childhood I have been hearing of Shell. And now as an adult I know that Shell has not contributed anything positive towards this community as a host. Instead of getting anything from Shell we are suffering from their activities. All the Cocoyam that we planted this

year have been ruined as none survived. Our mothers have suffered so much to clear their farms and plant but nothing came out from their efforts; even the fish ponds have been impacted now by the oil spill. Shell is responsible for all this

-JOY DAVID Native of Owerewere Community

I have six children and I have ponds and farms that everyone knows of in this community. But some of my ponds have been affected by this recent oil spill from Shell s pipeline. Shell must come and clean up the affected ponds and compensate me .

-ISHMAEL AARON, 75 year- old indigene of Owerewere Community.

OBSERVATION/CONCLUSION:

The Owerewere community people who went to the spill site with ERA expressed sadness about what they saw at the spill site, especially the way Shell and the company s staff/contractor handled the affair. Ordinarily when there is spill, Shell should have followed due process to access the spill site by approaching the community concerned and getting a complete team for a Joint Investigation Visit to ascertain the cause of spill. The people of Owerewere are not convinced that Shell staff do not have a hand in the cause of spill, since people from a neighbouring community were detailed to to scoop the crude oil day and night without the knowledge of the host/impacted community.

Apart from the GEEPEE tanks seized, all relative materials found around the spill site were confiscated by the Owerewere people. The spill was noticed to have spread to some hundreds of meters along the pipeline towards Owerewere and parts of the swamp. Because the Sun was very high and all who went to the site were bare footed, the crude oil was had a peppery sensation on the legs. At the time of visit (over one week), the spill was still spewing crude oil.

ERA DEMANDS:

- 1 The Federal Government should step in and investigate the allegations against Shell.
- 2 Shell should formally visit Owerewere community with a view to carrying the host community along in the bid to ascertain the cause of spill and finding a lasting solution.
- 3 Shell should follow due process and carry out proper clean up of the impacted environment
- 4 Shell should compensate the impacted community adequately.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

1. Write to NOSDRA Offices below asking for prompt action to be taken against Shell
2. Write to Shell offices below asking for prompt action to clean up the environment and compensate the impacted community

Shell Offices
LAGOS

The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd.
Freeman House, 21/22 Marina, PMB 2418
Lagos
Nigeria
Tel: +234 1 2769999 or 08070269999

WARRI
The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd.
P.O.Box 230
Warri, Nigeria
Tel: +234 53 449999

ABUJA
The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd.
House 13, Shell Trustees Estate,
Madeira Street, Off Shehu Shagari Way
Maitama, Abuja
Nigeria
Tel: +234 9 413 8110

PORT-HARCOURT
The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd.
P.O.Box 263, Shell Industrial Area, Rumuobiakani
Port Harcourt
Nigeria
Tel: +234 84 429999
Manager, Media Relations
Shell Nigeria
Tel: +234 1 27 65019
Fax: 234 1 2636791
E-mail: shellnigeria@ shell.com