

Location: Ikarama community, in Yenagoa LGA of Bayelsa State

Available statistics and reports show that Ikarama community, one of the six towns settled along the Taylor Creek that make up Okordia clan in Yenagoa Local Government Area, has the highest oil spill related incidents in Bayelsa state. Last year [2008] for instance, between June and December, the community experienced five oil spills at different sites. This year, four of such spills have also occurred, two of which happened as a result of equipment/operational failure inside the Okordia Manifold of Shell. As would be expected, the several spills have rendered much of the people's land, swamp, lakes, and ponds useless; these spill sites are more or less derelict spots in the community.

Despite the obvious need for Shell to clean up and remediate these polluted sites and sustained advocacy campaigns by environmental groups like ERA, Shell went ahead to make false claims early this year that it had commenced clean up of oil spill sites in the community since last year. Viewing the above claim as not only false but a misrepresentation of facts by Shell, ERA took steps to debunk the falsehood, even as community folks also expressed themselves through the media to present the facts.

ERA's field monitor spoke with some Ikarama indigenes on the Shell clean up exercise. These community folks include: Pastor FearGod Kologa [former Deputy Chief of Ikarama], Chief Mission Neberi, Chief Luke Obonah, Mr. Raphael Warder [Public Relations Officer of the community], Elder Belli Geoffery, Mrs. Ayibakuro Warder [women leader], Mr. Washington Odoiyibo [Chief Security Officer of the community], and Engineer Felix O [Former P.R.O of Ikarama]. Their views and comments are captured below.

FEARGOD KOLOGA, former Deputy Chief of Ikarama

Like I informed you during your last visit in May, 2009 [with the Africa Independent Television], due to the dogged and sustained advocacy mounted by your organisation [ERA] Shell visited the community to assess their several oil spill impacted sites with a view to effecting clean up. Soon after ERA and AIT's visit and the wide publicity given the issue of falsehood [the claim by Shell that clean up of spill sites had started since last year], Shell finally awarded clean up contracts on some of the oil spill impacted sites. One of those awarded is the spill site of 7th December, 2008, which was also set ablaze on the 1st of March, 2009, at the two lakes [Oya/Obrun]. The contract for the lake area was awarded in June, 2009 and work is now in progress.

We hope they will carry out remediation after the clean up as promised

CHIEF MISSION NEBERI

Yes, Shell has come to re-award the clean up contract for this oil spill impacted site close to my house. This area was impacted by the spill that occurred in 2006 from the pipeline delivering crude oil to Rumuekpe in Rivers State. As we told you in the past, after that spill a contract was awarded for the cleanup. But the contractor just scooped some of the crude oil and disappeared. We know that your organisation [ERA] has also visited this site many times, even with some foreigners. Now, Shell has re-awarded the cleanup job and though the grasses around the place have been cleared for work to start, the contractor is yet to really commence work on the cleanup.

CHIEF LUKE OBONAH

Our people believe this exercise Shell is currently embarking upon would not have happened without the interest ERA has in fighting for poor victims like us. The sustained effort in this regard is now yielding results we can see. I am glad that, at last, the oil spill impacted sites in the community are being looked into one by one. You know that the oil spill/fire impacted Obron Lake belongs to my family and we were really not happy that the lake was destroyed. Right now, effort is being made by the contractor to clean up the whole area. They are removing the oil slick from the surface of the water and surrounding environment. We are also hoping that Shell will award contract for remediation after the clean up exercise. For us, it is also proper that Shell compensates us for the damages caused our farms, lakes and environment. You know this resulted into some of us losing our means of livelihood.

MR. RAPHAEL WARDER, Public Relations Officer of Ikarama

Right what appears to be remediation work is taking place around the Okordia Manifold, the July 2007 oil spill impacted site. I heard one or two other sites in the community are also undergoing the same process, though I have not gone to those other areas to see for myself. You know that in our community it is families that own land. So people are keener about their own area of land. Because I am in charge of the Okordia Manifold [of Shell], as the one securing it, I go there every now and then. As we go to the site now you will see that some kind of work is going on.

At the site, ERA's field monitor saw the way things were and sought to know how the remediation work was being carried out and Mr. Raphael Warder responded thus:

Not much is being done. The contractor hired some youths to clear the grasses around the impacted site. After that, even though there had been no previous cleanup exercise, the hired persons are instructed to turn the soil upside down, using hoes and other crude implements. That is just what we observe them doing. For me, even though I am not an expert, I do not think this is what remediation should be like. I say so because even as they are turning the soil upside down, the crude oil deposit can be seen in the soil. So, what are they really doing? I thought by remediation implies a more holistic approach for the impacted land or water resource to regain its productivity. Why they go ahead with this kind of work without much challenge from

the community folks is that whenever we express such, the military would be used to threaten us. Shell's Community Liaison Officer [CLO], Mr. Tunde is fond of doing that to our people, threatening us with the JTF that goes about with them. For instance, even as they were working on this area, a fresh oil spill occurred inside the Manifold [in June, 2009]. The oil spill affected this area that is now said to be undergoing remediation. But, instead of carrying out a Joint Investigation Visit [JIV] to determine the cause of spill and without any attempt to clean up the fresh spill, Mr. Tunde ordered for the top soil in the impacted area to be turned upside down. When we raised objection to that act, he threatened us with the JTF, asking the community people to leave the place immediately.

You can still see the crude oil if you go there now. It is still very fresh; the soil itself cannot hide it. As for the one on the large body of water near the manifold, it is more difficult for them to hide it. It is there for all to see. They started this so-called remediation work at that site about two weeks ago.

ELDER BELLI GEOFFERY

I did a little bit of environmental studies at school. I think what Shell is doing here, which the company termed remediation, falls short of what remediation really should be. How can you say you are remediating without first cleaning the impacted site? Even if one can excuse them for that, how can you convince the expert that merely turning the top soil upside down at the impacted site amounts to remediation? While we appreciate the effort of environmental groups like ERA, we would want Shell to do the proper thing. What they are doing now is not remediation at all; they are only trying to hide the signs of the oil spill from people by turning the top soil upside down. Meanwhile, even as this is done, the crude oil is still thick inside the soil. From common sense, we can reasonably argue that such soil can never be productive again. The soil will not be conducive for the soil organisms that aid nutrient formation for plants. This is a fact only Shell may contest.

MRS AYIBAKURO WARDER

I have seen some persons going round the community hiring youths to do cleanup of oil spill impacted sites. They have even started remediation in some of the sites. You know when you visited in June this year I showed you one such spot. They were doing remediation at that particular site when the rains started and due to the collection of water there, they left it. Just about two or three weeks ago, they started remediation work around the Okordia manifold; that place where the 2007 spill from the manifold impacted. That area used to be our farming land. But since that oil spill we have been denied the right to use that land for anything. From the type of remediation they are doing now, I doubt if that land would ever become productive again. I don't know how it is done in other places but what they are doing here is not the best, because the crude oil is still inside the soil. They are only turning the soil upside down now.

MR. ROMAN GESIE

The situation is very pathetic. Though they have engaged some youths to do the work, the kind of work they are doing as remediation is not what we think remediation is all about. It is an annoying fact that the oil spills around the manifold were as a result of equipment failure and the company is denying us compensation. At our expense, some of these Shell staff have made so much money. Yet, they always come here to intimidate us with the military, doing cheap jobs and hoping to get away with the evil. Just recently there were two oil spills, in June and July,

2009, inside the manifold. They were both as a result of equipment failure. Instead of cleaning the impacted area, Shell has rather turned the soil in the impacted area upside down. Now, is this fair? Ordinarily, the land owners ought to be compensated for the destruction of their land. We depend on the land for many things and if they continue in this way to destroy the land, where can we farm? It is not proper for Shell to just turn the top soils upside down, at impacted sites. Besides, Shell should compensate us for damages to our environment

MR. WASHINGTON ODOYIBO

I will start by saying that all this work Shell is coming to do in our community now is as a result of ERA's effort in advocating for the environmental rights of our people. Though work is currently going on in some sites, not all oil spill impacted sites have been given out to contractors. I am glad that some of the spill sites that have remained uncleaned for years are now being given attention. Actually, since we are novices in the community, we wouldn't know whether the contractors are applying the right technology in the clean up and remediation works that are going on now.

ENGINEER FELIX O.

Some of the oil spill sites are undergoing one kind of work or the other i.e. clean up or remediation. Though work is yet to commence in some other sites, we believe all oil spill impacted sites would be touched by the on-going exercise at the end of the day. The only fear I have is the method the contractors are using for remediation. They should have applied the biological method of remediation to ensure effectiveness in returning the impacted sites to their former productive stage in the nearest future. By introducing the right kind of bacteria, the biological method would have worked better for us.

ERA observed that the area said to be undergoing remediation is as described by the people themselves; the top soil was just turned upside down. This is the case around the Okordia Manifold. In some areas fresh crude oil could be easily seen as on the large body of water close to the manifold, one of the sites seriously impacted by the spill of July, 2007. The fresh oil slick from the recent spills of June and July 2009 has increased the volume of oil slick floating on the water.

Community folks have informed ERA that some work is on-going, even as witnessed by the field monitor. However, because of the facts on ground and the apprehension of the community people, recommendation is hereby made that

1 Shell should not just embark on a mission to hide the signs of the crude oil by turning top

soils of impacted sites upside down; a proper clean up should precede remediation.

2 Shell should adopt internationally accepted methods in the remediation exercise at Ikarama.

3 The Ikarama people should insist on carrying out environmental audit after Shell has concluded its cleaning and so-called remediation. A real scientific analysis of the impacted sites should form part of the exercise to ensure that the environment has been properly cleaned up.

4 The relevant Agencies and authorities should ensure that the environmental injustices against the people of Ikarama by Shell are halted. The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency [NOSDRA] should also be part of ensuring the above.