

Field Report #211

16 October 2009

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INTRODUCTION

The people of Ojumole are predominantly fishermen. Ojumole community is close to Omuro community and both host Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) oil facilities.

ERA Monitor reached Ojumole after a 45minutes speedboat ride from Ugbo-nla, Ilaje.

This field visit was carried out to assess the level of damage done by the fire outbreak that occurred on the 3 October 2009 at a Chevron facility at Ojumole. It was also to ascertain the response of the oil giant to this severe incident

OBSERVATION

During the visit ERA monitor observed that the spill and the resulting fire from the facility destroyed much vegetation on the path of the fire, many fishing lines and nets, and some buildings. The river was awash with crude. The only visible response from Chevron was a boom the company sent for community use in containing the spill. There was no assistance of any sort from experienced personnel. Efforts to remediate the spill are yet to start almost two weeks after the incident

TESTIMONIES

Prince Ade Oduusola, a fisherman and generator and boat engine engineer:

On the 3rd of October, 2009 at about 9-10pm I looked out of my house and saw a large fire from the direction of CNL oil facility at Ojumole, The cause of the fire I don't know, but all I know is that oil spilled from the CNL abandoned oil well head and we saw fire. We immediately alerted CNL about the fire, but they did not show up until the 5th day when they came with choppers hovering over the area of the fire. What we observed afterwards was that the fire has been put off.

But the fire had raged for four (4) days and destroyed our fishing lines, nets and some houses around the facility. The spill also polluted our source of drinking water. Right now we cannot fish from the river and naturally this is our fishing season. Before this Inferno we have called on Chevron abandoned this field on 19 September 1998 on the excuse that the well was dried.

Mrs Duro Oduusola - she spoke in her local dialect

On the faithful night of 3rd October 2009 we were at home when we observed a huge fire around CNL oil facility at Ojumole. We raised alarm as many community people had already done too. We sent messages to CNL to come put off the fire but they never came until 5 days after when they came with helicopters. We have lost our fishing nets. No fish to catch and our river has been polluted. No more drinking water for us. Right now am sick with strange cough and catarrh.

Prince Ogunfeyeimi - A businessman and community leader from Awoye community:

The Omuro and Ojumole oil wells were installed and were producing from 1995 to 1998. In 1998 when Ijaw and Ilaje people had a crisis CNL left the facility.

We have complained to the state government and Chevron Nigeria Limited that they should return back to Omuro and Ojumole Oil fields but they have bluntly refused telling us that the oil well is not productive i.e. it is dried.

In recent times when people going to their farms passed by the Ojumole oil facility they hear pressure sounds mounting from the facility. We alerted CNL through series of letters, but they kept saying the well is not producing. We called on them to remove their facility if they don't want to return, repair and protect it.

On the 3rd of October I got a call from my people at about 12midnight telling me about the inferno. We alerted CNL but they left the fire to burn for 4 days before responding. Till date CNL has not come to commiserate with the people, neither have they paid compensation nor come to clean up the spill.

Mr Owoyele Dele - a self employed Ojumole community man living at Igbokoda:

Before the 1998 crisis of Ijaw and Ilaje people, Chevron operated for 3 years at Ojumole oil field. They left the field during the crisis. On the 3rd October, 2009 at 12midnight I got disturbing

calls telling of the inferno back at home. I left for Ojumole with my video camera to the scene, I asked about the cause of the fire but no one could tell. We alerted Chevron of the incidence but left the flames to burn for 4 more days. This oil spill and the resulting fire has killed the fishes and some animals, destroyed some thatch houses around the site and polluted our river which serves as our source of drinking water.

Barr. Jide Nana a Lawyer and community leader:

We have written several letters to CNL and the state Government that Chevron should return to Ojumole and Omuro Oil fields or remove their facility as stated in the pipeline Act of Nigeria, which says that if any facility is no longer in operation or in use it be removed within 3months of inactivity.

CNL replied once saying they stopped operation on the fields due to operational reasons best know to them and denied their earlier claims of the wells being dry.

We then wrote back to them that they should come to inform and protect the people from any dangers that could occur from the contact with the equipment. They never responded.

Until the 3rd of October 2009 when we got calls telling about the Inferno at Ijumole, all we could say is that our fears have come to pass. We immediately called on CNL reporting the incidence and making a call that the fire be put off, they never came to the site until 4days after.

Six days after the fire incident Chevron called for a meeting with community leaders at Okpuekaba community (this community also has an oil field). We went there and they brought boom materials which was handed over to us. We took it expecting them to send skilled personnel to go with us to fix it but to our greatest amazement they left us to do it ourselves. As leaders we felt if we leave the spill unchecked our people would continue to suffer, so we went ahead to do it to the best of our ability.

We were still hoping they would return to clean up the spill. As we speak, nothing has been done. No relief materials have been sent to the community. No compensation to community people who lost their properties, no sensitization on how to handle the situation. No development or benefits from their operation in the community. No drinking water as the river our source of drinking water has been polluted. Our livelihood is grounded.

Further testimony by Barrister Nana: Chevron s divide-and-rule games

There are threee (3) oil fields in Ilaje land: Okpuekaba, Omuro and Ojumole respectively. The Okpuekaba field is still functional while the other 2 fields have been abandoned following claims that the wells are dried. However, we know there is a pipeline that connects the Omuro and Ojumole oil fields to Okpuekaba field.

In 2005, CNL decided to sign a Global Memorandum of Understanding, G MoU with the 3 communities as a way of ensuring development and progress but to our amazement they only contacted Okpuekaba leaders who signed the document living behind Omuro and Ojumole

communities.

We protested in writing to CNL and the State government. The government advised that we should wait and expect a new deal when a new G MoU would be signed four years later.

Now the time has come for the new G MoU, CNL is refusing to integrate Omuro and Ojumole communities into the agreement plan claiming that we are not producing oil for them. We see this as their usual way of causing disunity and violence between communities. It is unacceptable to us as we want peace to prevail.

We are saying that if CNL should bring a comprehensive EIA to show which community is impacted by their activities as all the 3 communities are a stone throw from each other. We believe that G MoU can only be implemented in an atmosphere of peace. Therefore we call CNL to integrate all 3 communities into the G MoU plan.

Community Demands that:

- Chevron should clean up the spill and remediate the polluted environment

- Chevron should pay compensation and or bring relief materials to the people

- Chevron should either come back to operate on the Omuro and Ojumole field or protect the facility prior the removal from their present location.

- Chevron should cease its neo-colonial acts of exploitation and divide-and-rule.