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Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) has called on the Federal Government to carry out a comprehensive probe of all transactions relating to the Bonga Oil Field Development

Besides, it wants the government to identify and punish corporations and individuals involved in the cases of bribery and irregularities in the implementation of the project

The \$700 million Bonga project is Nigeria's first deepwater oil development .

The well is located in Oil Prospecting License (OPL) 212, which was awarded to Shell Nigeria Exploration and Production Company Limited (SNEPCO) during Nigeria's first round of deepwater frontier acreage awards in 1993. It has an estimated reserve of 600,000 barrels of crude oil.

The foremost environmental rights body said the probe had become inevitable following Monday's admission of guilt at a Houston Federal Court in the United States by Vetco International Limited that it paid \$2.1 million bribe to Nigerian officials to undercut customs regulations.

In a closed hearing, Vecto subsidiaries, Vetco Gray Controls Inc, Vetco Gray Controls Ltd and Vetco Gray Uk Ltd, pleaded guilty for paying the bribe and agreed to pay \$26 million fine for violating the U.S Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. The fine is the biggest under the Act

Vecto was said to have paid the bribe to Nigerian Customs officials between September 2002 and April 2005 when it was providing engineering and procurement services and subsea construction equipment for the Bonga project

Four former employees of ABB Ltd, the former owners of Vetco, had earlier paid \$235,000 fine to the U.S Securities and Exchange Commission for bribing Nigerian officials to secure the Bonga contract

"The Vecto case has reinforced the need for a clinical probe of all transactions around the Bonga project. That project has revealed high level corruption in the oil and gas industry.

"The shocking aspect of it all is that each time we have a revelation like this, the home governments of the corporation imposes huge fines on them while the Nigerian government maintains deafening silence," said ERA/FoEN Executive Director, Nnimmo Bassey, in a statement

The group stated that several allegations of irregularities and corrupt practices have been linked

to the project

For instance, a report by the Senate Committee on the Upstream Petroleum Sector alleged that the Federal Government lost N602 billion (\$4.3billion).

"Shell has even admitted in its report prepared by WAS Global services entitled "Peace and Security in the Niger Delta" that it feeds a vicious cycle of violence and corruption in the Niger Delta, and we continue to wonder why no government agency is interested in bringing these corporations and their Nigerian allies to justice. It is totally unacceptable," Bassey added.