



ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS ACTION / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH, NIGERIA

214, Uselu Lagos Road, P.O.Box 10577 Ugbowo, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

Tel: 052-880619, email: eraction@eraction.org. Website: www.eraction.org

ENVIRONMENTAL TESTIMONIES 2009/03

Title: Etieama Experiences another Oil Spillage

Location: Etieama, Nembe LGA, Bayelsa State

Date of visit: 22nd May, 2009

From: Alagoa Morris and Akpotu Ziworitin

Introduction

Etieama is an Ijaw community situated in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. It is about 35 minutes by speedboat from Ogbia town.

The community is host to Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) oil facility.



ERA's field monitors visited the community on May 22, 2009 following the report of an oil spillage in the community.

Community folks said Agip does not have a culture of maintaining their pipeline that has been laid in the community since 1972. Consequently, the community has experienced three incidents of oil spillage in 1995, 2000 and 2009. Year 2000 oil spillage resulted in the death of some vibrant youths of the community employed to assist with clamping of the ruptured pipeline.

The current spill is yet to be cleaned up.

Testimonies from Community Folks

Chief Joel Abio- Pekene, Vice Chairman, Community Development Committee

"We experienced an oil spill in the year 2000 which led to the death of 18 vibrant youths of this community. This community has experienced three oil spills since the Brass/Ogoda pipeline of Agip was

laid in 1972. I have the receipts concerning payment for the acquisition of the land by Agip. The first of these spills occurred in 1995, while the other happened in the year 2000; before this current one.

We cannot tell the exact date of this current oil spill but we know it occurred in the 3rd week of April, 2009. We got the report from some women who returned from visiting their fish traps around the spill impacted site. They came back and relayed the information that they noticed crude oil all around that particular area.

It is sad to note that Agip never bothered to check their pipeline since it was laid in the 1970s. The company checks the pipeline only when there is an incidence of oil spill. I don't know whether Agip normally does their checking of pipelines from the air, but common sense dictates that owners of such an important facility carry out regular/routine checks to ensure safety."

When asked if Agip or government officials have visited since the current oil spill, the Chief replied:



"Yes, after we confirmed the incident, we reported the matter to Agip and they visited on 20th May, 2009 to effect containment of the spill and prevent it from spreading further. No government officials have visited as a result of this oil spill."

Continuing, the chief said:

"Another thing that we have observed is that, while Agip engaged other community folks to do surveillance/clearing around the pipeline, our people were denied that job. We thought the concept of surveillance/clearing has been abolished by Agip, but when I went to the company recently, I discovered that the job is being handled by people/contractors from other communities.

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You can see that most of our people are not happy because this oil spill has brought back sad memories of the last spill that occurred in the year 2000. Eighteen of our youths who died were called to assist in clamping and an unexpected spark from the machine used caused the fire that burnt them. Some of us were even arrested as a result of that matter. Now, you can see that Agip is delaying the process of clamping and clean up. May be they are waiting to see some harm befall us before they will come with their fire brigade approach to issues. We are indeed perplexed by the attitude of Agip.



Etieama folks do not benefit from Agip scholarship or employment. However, people from several other communities are beneficiaries. Agip is not treating us well.

We have a primary school here in the community that has just one teacher teaching all the classes; from primary one to primary six. Yet, this is a state government owned

educational facility, with several names receiving salaries as persons posted to Etieama community to teach. We have even made accommodation available for teachers but they are not coming to teach our children. Any time the only teacher we have is sick and fails to attend school the school does not function. Due to the situation, some children accompany their parents to fish and farm instead of going to school. In fact, some women in the community staged a protest to my house not long ago on the matter. We are also aware that one of the teachers posted to this community, a lady, is trading at the market in Nembe. Even though she doesn't report to work she still receives her salary monthly. This is very sad to note."

Commenting further on the plight of the community, Chief Joel said:



"We had a Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] with Agip after the incidence that led to the demise of the 18 youths in 2000. Agip is yet to fulfil any of the agreements reached with the community. For instance, Agip agreed to sink a borehole, construct an over head water tank and lay water distribution pipes in the community. Though Agip managed to construct the over head tank and sink the borehole, we are yet to drink a single drop of water from that project because the job has been abandoned.

In terms of electricity, as part of the agreement, Agip agreed to give us solar powered source of electricity. They did that job, but it did not last; none of them is working right now. We are managing with the generator supplied to the community in 1982 by the administration of Chief Melford Okilo [in the old Rivers State]. Through community efforts we repair and maintain that generator; even now it is undergoing some repairs.

Agip also agreed to assist us with the construction of a link road to Nembe, Ogbolomabiri. It is a 3.5 kilometers access road. Instead of awarding that contract at once, Agip has been dilly dallying; awarding just about 100 or 150 metres yearly. Because of that, we felt we should utilise that on the internal roads within the community. That's why we now have some good roads within our community. Some development agencies came in to assist in constructing some. We still trek from here to Nembe and Okoroba, sometimes motor bikes ply the route too.

Agip has owed us some money since 2002. The company owes us ~~N~~4.8 million, money meant for reacquisition of the pipeline in our environment. Agip has held on to that money on the excuse that two indigenes of Etieama community are contending for supremacy. They insist that the money would be paid only after the contending parties have settled the matter. Agip is taking advantage of our people all the time."

Chief Joel Abio- Pekene made some demands on behalf of his people. They include:

- 1 Agip should replace their pipelines because they are old and weak, resulting in oil spill.

- 2 The surveillance/clearing of the bush around their oil facility within Etieama environment should be given to the Etieama community. This should be from boundary to boundary.
- 3 While clamping of the ruptured spot on the pipeline and clean up are most desirable, Agip should come to Etieama for a round table discussion with the Etieama people before effecting clamping and clean up, based on the last experience.

In the light of the last demand, ERA queried the rationale behind not allowing clamping by Agip until a round table was held, considering the danger posed to the environment if the crude oil was allowed to continue spewing. The response of Chief Joel Abio- Pekene was:

“The environment has been suffering since the 1970s when Agip passed their pipeline through the community. So, it is not new to us. We have been denied a lot in terms of our means of livelihood. We are dying and only efforts to revive us would be good enough.”

Stanley Isobo, former Chairman of the Community Development Committee

“If Agip is not ready to change their old pipes, they should leave our environment. We cannot continue to suffer from Agip’s negligence in this regard”

Mrs. Dinekite Johnny

“We the mothers are reminded of the unfortunate death of our sons and brothers in the last oil spill. It was sad to note that while Agip sent their staff [that was also affected by the fire] abroad for better medical attention/treatment, our youths were allowed to die here in the hospital [at the UPTH Port Harcourt]. Perhaps some would have survived out of the 18 that died if Agip had assisted us to take them abroad as they did for their staff.

As you went to the spill impacted site, I guess you saw some fish traps. We used to catch fish in that area of the bush. Our major occupation here is fishing we do not rely only on the creeks and rivers around us. The swamps too serve as our source of fish, especially as we are yet to recover from the crude oil slick that spread to our creeks and rivers from the spill that happened at Sabatoru not too long ago. That spill, also from Agip pipeline, had a severe impact on us as fisher folks. Sometimes we notice, up till now, some of our aquatic life like crab, dying on their own. If you had visited about two weeks or so ago, you would have observed some cat fish floating. This is our plight”

Other persons present when ERA took the above testimonies include John B. Garick, Kiegha Imunakuma, Nelson O. Nelson, Kienpaemi Alfred and Richard Omodede

Observations

Despite the good internal road network in the community, the town displayed poverty and gross neglect. Most of the houses are made of local building materials; wood and thatches.

As a fishing community, almost every house had fishing gears, nets and traps, conspicuously displayed. Some natives were seen either mending old nets or constructing new ones. While three water tanks resulting from separate projects could be seen in place, none of these water projects is functioning. The people are drinking from a pool of water situated at the centre of the town, not a well. The non-functioning water facilities were constructed by Agip, State and Local Government. That of the local government was of Gee Pee tank. The Etieama/ Nembe link road has not advanced more than 500 meters.

Conclusion/ Recommendations

The community people are not happy with Agip for polluting their environment and not keeping to agreements reached with the community. It is believed that opening reliable/ effective lines of communication between Agip and the people will yield positive outcomes. ERA recommends that:

- 1 Agip should immediately clamp the ruptured spot on the pipeline and carry out proper clean up of the oil spill.
- 2 Proper investigation should be carried out to ascertain the cause of spill, with representatives of the community present.
- 3 Agip should pay monetary debt owed the community (as reported by **Chief Joel Abio- Pekene**).
- 4 Apart from clamping, Agip should take steps to clean the heavy crude oil spewed into the environment before the heavy rains, to prevent the slick spreading into the rivers and creeks.
- 5 The surveillance and clearing of the bush around the oil facility in the community should be given to the host community.
- 6 The state and local government should not only ensure that all teachers posted to Etieama are on ground, the authorities should make their presence felt by completing projects meant for the town.